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T H E
W O R K S

Of the MOST REVEREND

Dr *JOHN TILLOTSON,*

Late Lord Archbishop of *Canterbury.*

IN TEN VOLUMES.

V O L. II.

EDINBURGH:

Printed by W^{AL}. RUDDIMAN & COMPANY,

AND

A. MURRAY & J. COCHRAN.

MDCCCLXXII.

THE

WORKS

OF THE MOST REVEREND

DR JOHN W. FILLISTON

Late Lord Bishop of Canterbury

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IN TEN VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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S E R M O N XXII.

The lawfulness and obligation of oaths.

Preached at the assizes held at Kingston upon Thames,
July 21. 1681.

The E P I S T L E D E D I C A T O R Y.

To the Rt Worshipful, and my honoured friend, JOSEPH
REEVE, Esq; High Sheriff of the county of Surry.

S I R,

WHen I had performed the service which you were
pleased to call me to, in the preaching of this ser-
mon, I had no thoughts of making it more public; and yet
in this also I was the more easily induced to comply with
your desire, because of the suitableness of the argument to
the age in which we live; wherein, as men have run into
the wildest extremities in other things, so particularly in the
matter of oaths; some making conscience of taking any oaths
at all, and too many none at all of breaking them.

To convince the great mistake of the one extreme, and to
check the growing evil and mischief of the other, is the chief
design of this discourse. To which I shall be very glad if,
by God's blessing, it may prove any ways serviceable. I am,

S I R,

Your very faithful and humble servant,

JO. TILLOTSON.

The S E R M O N.

H E B. vi. 16.

And an oath for confirmation is to them an end of all strife.

THE necessity of religion to the support of hu-
man society, in nothing appears more evi-
dently than in this, that the obligation of an
oath, which is so necessary for the mainte-
nance of peace and justice among men, depends wholly
upon the sense and belief of a Deity: for no reason can

be imagined, why any man that doth not believe a God, should make the least conscience of an oath; which is nothing else but a solemn appeal to God, as a witness of the truth of what we say. So that whoever promotes Atheism and infidelity, doth the most destructive thing imaginable to human society; because he takes away the reverence and obligation of oaths; and whenever that is generally cast off, human society must disband, and all things run into disorder. The just sense whereof made David cry out to God with so much earnestness, as if the world had been cracking, and the frame of it ready to break in pieces, Psal. xii. 1. *Help, Lord, for the righteous man ceaseth, and the faithful fail from among the children of men*; intimating, that when faith fails from among men, nothing but a particular and immediate interposition of the divine providence can preserve the world from falling into confusion. And our blessed Saviour gives this as a sign of the end of the world, and the approaching dissolution of all things, when faith and truth shall hardly be found among men: Luke xviii. 8. *When the Son of man comes, shall he find faith on the earth?* This state of things doth loudly call for his coming to destroy the world; which is even ready to dissolve and fall in pieces of itself, when these bands and pillars of human society do break and fail. And surely never in any age was this sign of the coming of the Son of man more glaring and terrible, than in this degenerate age wherein we live, when almost all sorts of men seem to have broke loose from all obligations to faith and truth.

And therefore I do not know any argument more proper and useful to be treated of upon this occasion, than of the nature and obligation of an oath; which is the utmost security that one man can give to another of the truth of what he says; the strongest tie of fidelity; the surest ground of judicial proceedings; and the most firm and sacred bond that can be laid upon all that are concerned in the administration of public justice, upon judge, and jury, and witnesses.

And for this reason I have pitched upon these words; in which the Apostle declares to us the great use and necessity of oaths among men: *An oath for confirmation is to them an end of all strife*. He had said before, that, for
our

our greater assurance and comfort, God hath confirmed his promises to us by an oath; condescending herein to deal with us after the manner of men, who, when they would give credit to a doubtful matter, confirm what they say by an oath. And generally, when any doubt or controversy ariseth between parties concerning a matter of fact, one side affirming, and the other denying, an end is put to this contest by an oath; *an oath for confirmation being to them an end of all strife*; *An oath for confirmation, is ὁ καταγωγὴν*, “for the greater assurance and establishment of a thing.” Not that an oath is always a certain and infallible decision of things according to truth and right, but that this is the utmost credit that we can give to any thing, and the last resort of truth and confidence among men. After this we can go no farther; for if the religion of an oath will not oblige men to speak truth, nothing will. This is the utmost security that men can give, and must therefore be the final decision of all contests: *An oath for confirmation is to them an end of all strife.*

Now, from this assertion of the Apostle concerning the great use and end of oaths among men, I shall take occasion,

1. To consider the nature of an oath, and the kinds of it.
2. To shew the great use, and even necessity, of oaths, in many cases.
3. To vindicate the lawfulness of them where they are necessary.
4. To shew the sacred obligation of an oath.

I shall be as brief in these as the just handling of them will bear.

I. For the nature of an oath, and the kinds of it. An oath is an invocation of God, or an appeal to him as a witness of the truth of what we say. So that an oath is a sacred thing, as being an act of religion, and an invocation of the name of God; and this whether the name of God be expressly mentioned in it or not. If a man only say, *I swear*, or, *I take my oath*, that a thing is, or is not so or so, or that I will, or will not do such a thing; or if a man answer upon his oath, being adjured and required so to do; or if a man *swear by heaven, or*

by *earth*, or by any other thing that hath relation to God : in all these cases a man doth virtually call God to witness ; and in so doing, he doth by consequence invoke him as a judge, and an avenger, in case what he swears be not true : and if this be expressed, the oath is a formal imprecation ; but whether it be or not, a curse upon ourselves is always implied in case of perjury.

There are two sorts of oaths ; assertory, and promissory. An assertory oath is when a man affirms or denies upon oath a matter of fact, past or present ; when he swears that a thing was, or is so, or not so. A promissory oath is a promise confirmed by an oath, which always respects something that is future : and if the promise be made directly and immediately to God, then it is called a *vow* ; if to men, an *oath*. I proceed to the

II. Second thing ; which is, to shew the great use, and even necessity, of oaths, in many cases ; which is so great, that human society can very hardly, if at all, subsist long without them. Government would many times be very unsecure ; and for the faithful discharge of offices of great trust, in which the welfare of the public is nearly concerned, it is not possible to find any security equal to that of an oath ; because the obligation of that reacheth to the most secret and hidden practices of men, and takes hold of them in many cases where the penalty of no human law can have any awe or force upon them. And especially it is (as the Civil law expresseth it) *maximum expediendarum litium remedium* ; “ the best means of “ ending controversies.” And where mens estates or lives are concerned, no evidence but what is assured by an oath, will be thought sufficient to decide the matter, so as to give full and general satisfaction to mankind ; for in matters of so great concernment, when men have all the assurance that can be had, and not till then, they are contented to sit down, and rest satisfied with it. And among all nations an oath hath always been thought the only peremptory and satisfactory way of deciding such controversies.

III. The third thing I proposed was, to vindicate the lawfulness of oaths where they are necessary. And it is a very strong inducement to believe the lawfulness of them, that the unavoidable condition of human affairs hath

hath made them so necessary. The Apostle takes it for granted, that an oath is not only of great use in human affairs, but in many cases of great necessity, to confirm a doubtful thing, and to put an end to controversies which cannot otherwise be decided to the satisfaction of the parties contending: *An oath for confirmation is to them an end of all strife.* And indeed it is hardly imaginable, that God should not have left that lawful which is so evidently necessary to the peace and security of mankind.

But because there is a sect sprung up in our memory, which hath called in question the lawfulness of all oaths, to the great mischief and disturbance of human society, I shall endeavour to search this matter to the bottom, and to manifest how unreasonable and groundless this opinion is. And, to this end, I shall,

1. Prove the lawfulness of oaths from the authority of this text, and from the reasons plainly contained or strongly implied in it.

2. I shall shew the weakness and insufficiency of the grounds of the contrary opinion, whether from reason, or from scripture; which last they principally rely upon; and if it could be made out from thence, would determine the case.

1. I shall prove the lawfulness of oaths from the authority of this text, and the reasons plainly contained or strongly implied in it: because the Apostle doth not only speak of the use of oaths among men, without any manner of censure and reproof, but as a commendable custom and practice, and in many cases necessary for the confirmation of doubtful matters, and in order to the final decision of controversies and differences among men. For,

1st, He speaks of it as the general practice of mankind, to confirm things by an oath, in order to the ending of differences. And indeed there is nothing that hath more universally obtained in all ages and nations of the world; than which there is not a more certain indication that a thing is agreeable to the law of nature, and the best reason of mankind. And that this was no degenerate practice of mankind, like that of idolatry, is from hence evident; that when God separated a people to himself, it was practised among them, by the holy pa-

triarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; and was afterwards not only allowed, but in many cases commanded by the law of Moses; which, had it been a thing evil in itself, and forbidden by the law of nature, would not have been done.

2dly, Another undeniable argument from the text, of the lawfulness of oaths, is, that God himself, in condescension to the custom of men, who use to confirm and give credit to what they say by an oath, is represented by the Apostle as confirming his promise to us by an oath, ver. 13. *When God made the promise to Abraham, because he could swear by none greater, he swears by himself. For men verily swear by the greater: and an oath for confirmation is to them an end of all strife. Wherein God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath: which he certainly would not have done, had an oath been unlawful in itself. For that had been to comply with men in an evil practice, and by his own example to give countenance to it in the highest manner: but though God condescends to represent himself to us after the manner of men, he never does it in any thing that is in its own nature evil and sinful.*

3dly, From the great usefulness of oaths in human affairs, to give credit and confirmation to our word, and to put an end to contestations. Now, that which serves to such excellent purposes, and is so convenient for human society, and for mutual security and confidence among men, ought not easily to be presumed unlawful, till it be plainly proved to be so. And, if we consider the nature of an oath, and every thing belonging to it, there is nothing that hath the least appearance of evil in it. There is surely no evil in it, as it is an act of religion; nor as it is an appeal to God as a witness and avenger in case we swear falsely; nor as it is a confirmation of a doubtful matter; nor as it puts an end to strife and controversy. And these are all the essential ingredients of an oath, and the ends of it; and they are all so good, that they rather commend it, than give the least colour of ground to condemn it. I proceed, in the

2. Second place, to shew the weakness and insufficiency

ency of the grounds of the contrary opinion, whether from reason, or from scripture.

1st, From reason. They say the necessity of an oath is occasioned by the want of truth and fidelity among men; and that every man ought to demean himself with that faithfulness and integrity, as may give credit and confirmation to his word; and then oaths will be needless. This pretence will be fully answered if we consider these two things.

1. That in matters of great importance, no other obligation, besides that of an oath, hath been thought sufficient, amongst the best and wisest of men, to assert their fidelity to one another. “Even the best men (to use the words of a great author) have not trusted the best men without it:” As we see in very remarkable instances, where oaths have passed between those who might be thought to have the greatest confidence in one another; as, between Abraham, and his old faithful servant Eliezer, concerning the choice of a wife for his son; between father and son, Jacob and Joseph, concerning the burial of his father in the land of Canaan; between two of the dearest and most intimate friends, David and Jonathan, to assure their friendship to one another; and it had its effect long after Jonathan’s death, in the saving of Mephibosheth, when reasons of state, and the security of his throne, seemed to move David strongly to the contrary; for it is expressly said, 2 Sam. xxi. 7. that David *spared Mephibosheth, Jonathan’s son, because of the oath of the Lord that was between them*; implying, that, had it not been for his oath, other considerations might probably have prevailed with him to have permitted him to have been cut off with the rest of Saul’s children.

2. This reason, which is alledged against oaths among men, is much stronger against God’s confirming his promises to us by an oath: for he, who is truth itself, is surely of all other most to be credited upon his bare word, and his oath needless to give confirmation to it; and yet he condescends to add his oath to his word. And therefore that reason is evidently of no force.

2^{dly}, From scripture. Our Saviour seems altogether to forbid swearing in any case, Matth. v. 33. 34. 37. *Ye have heard that it hath been said by them of old time, Thou shalt*

shalt not forswear thyself. But I say unto you, Swear not at all; neither by heaven, &c. But let your communication be, Yea, yea, and, Nay, nay; for whatsoever is more than these, cometh of evil. And this law St James recites, chap. v. 12. as that which Christians ought to have a very particular and principal regard to: *Above all things, my brethren, swear not.* And he makes the breach of this law a damning sin: *lest ye fall into condemnation.* But the authority of our Saviour alone is sufficient; and therefore I shall only consider that text.

And, because here lies the main strength of this opinion of the unlawfulness of oaths, it is very fit that this text be fully considered; and that it be made very evident, that it was not our Saviour's meaning by this prohibition wholly to forbid the use of oaths.

But, before I enter upon this matter, I will readily grant, that there is scarce any error whatsoever that hath a more plausible colour from scripture than this; which makes the case of those who are seduced into it the more pitiable. But then it ought to be considered, how much this doctrine of the unlawfulness of oaths reflects upon the Christian religion; since it is so evidently prejudicial both to human society in general, and particularly to those persons that entertain it: neither of which ought rashly to be supposed, and taken for granted, concerning any law delivered by our Saviour; because, upon these terms, it will be very hard for us to vindicate the divine wisdom of our Saviour's doctrine, and the reasonableness of the Christian religion. Of the inconvenience of this doctrine to human society, I have spoken already. But, besides this, it is very prejudicial to them that hold it. It renders them suspected to government, and, in many cases, incapable of the common benefits of justice, and other privileges of human society; and exposeth them to great penalties, as the constitution of all laws and governments at present is; and it is not easy to imagine how they should be otherwise: and, which is very considerable in this matter, it sets those who refuse oaths upon very unequal terms with the rest of mankind, if, where the estates and lives of men are equally concerned, their bare testimonies shall be admitted without an oath, and others shall be obliged to speak upon oath;
nothing

nothing being more certain in experience, than that many men will lie for their interest, when they will not be perjured, God having planted in the natural consciences of men a secret dread of perjury above most other sins. And this inconvenience is so great, as to render those who refuse oaths in all cases almost intolerable to human society. I speak not this, either to bring them into trouble, or to persuade them to measure truth by their interest. But, on the other hand I must needs say, that it is no argument, either of a wise or good man, to take up any opinion, especially such a one as is greatly to his prejudice, upon slight grounds. And this very consideration, that it is so much to their inconvenience, may justly move them to be very careful in the examination of it.

This being premised, I come now to explain this prohibition of our Saviour. And, to this purpose, I desire these three things may be well considered.

1. That several circumstances of these words of our Saviour do manifestly shew, that they ought to be interpreted in a limited sense, as only forbidding swearing in common conversation; “needless and heedless oaths,” as one expresseth it; and in general all voluntary swearing, unless upon some great and weighty cause, in which the glory of God and the good of the souls of men is concerned. For that in such cases a voluntary oath may be lawful, I am induced to believe, from the example of St Paul, who useth it more than once upon such occasions: of which I shall hereafter give particular instances.

And this was the sense of wise men among the Heathen, that men should not swear but upon necessity and great occasion. Thus Eusebius the philosopher, in Stobæus, counsels men. “Some (says he) advise men to be careful to swear the truth; but I advise principally that men do not easily swear at all;” that is, not upon any slight, but only upon weighty occasions. To the same purpose Epictetus; “Shun oaths wholly, if it be possible; if not, however as much as thou canst.” And so likewise Simplicius, in his comment upon him; “We ought wholly to shun swearing, except upon occasions of great necessity.” And Quintilian, among
the

the Romans, *In totum jurare, nisi ubi necesse est, gravi viro parum convenit* : “ To swear at all, except where “ it is necessary, does not well suit with a wise man.”

And that this prohibition of our Saviour’s ought to be understood of oaths in ordinary conversation, appears from the opposition which our Saviour makes : *Swear not at all ; but let your communication be, Yea, yea ;* that is, in your ordinary commerce and affairs, do not interpose oaths ; but say and do. And this is very much confirmed, in that our Saviour does not, under this general prohibition, instance in such oaths as are expressly by the name of God. The reason whereof is this : The Jews thought it unlawful, in ordinary communication, to swear expressly by the name of God, but lawful to swear by the creatures, as *by heaven* and *earth*, &c. So that our Saviour’s meaning is, as if he had said, “ You think “ you may swear in common conversation, provided “ you do not swear by the name of God : but I say unto “ you, Let your communication be without oaths of any “ kind ; you shall not so much as swear *by heaven*, or “ *by earth*, because God is virtually invoked in every “ oath.” And, unless we suppose this to be our Saviour’s meaning, I do not see what good reason can be given, why our Saviour should only forbid them to swear by the creatures, and not much rather by the name of God ; such oaths being surely of all others most to be avoided, as being the most direct abuse and profanation of the name of God.

2. It is very considerable to the explaining of this prohibition, that there are like general expressions in other Jewish authors concerning this very matter ; which yet must of necessity be thus limited. Maimonides, from the ancient Rabbies, gives this rule, That “ it is “ best not to swear at all.” And Philo useth almost the same words. And Rabbi Jonathan comes very near our Saviour’s expression, when he says, “ The just man “ will not swear at all ; not so much as by the common “ names of God, nor by his attributes, nor by his “ works, as *by heaven*, or the angels, or the law.” Now, it is not imaginable, that these learned Jews should condemn oaths in all cases, when the law of Moses did in many cases expressly require them. And therefore they

they are to be understood of voluntary oaths in ordinary conversation. And that the Jews meant this by *not swearing at all*, seems to be very plain from a passage in Josephus; who says, that the sect of the Essenes forbade their disciples to swear at all; and yet he tells us, at the same time, that they who were admitted into that sect, took an oath to observe the laws and rules of it. So that they who forbade to swear at all, allowed of oaths imposed by the authority of superiors.

3. Which will peremptorily decide this matter, this prohibition of our Saviour's cannot be understood to forbid all oaths, without a plain contradiction to the undoubted practice of the primitive Christians, and of the Apostles, and even of our Lord himself. Origen and Tertullian tell us, that the Christians refused to swear by the Emperor's genius; not because it was an oath, but because they thought it to be idolatrous. But the same Tertullian says, that the Christians were willing to swear *per salutem Imperatoris*; "by the health and safety of the Emperor." Athanasius being accused to Constantius, purged himself by oath; and desired that his accuser might be put to his oath, *sub attestazione veritatis*; "by calling the truth to witness:" by which form, says he, we Christians are wont to swear. But, which is more than this, St Paul, upon weighty occasions, does several times in his epistles call God to witness for the truth of what he says; which is the very formality of an oath: *God is my witness*, Rom. i. 9. *As God is true, our word was not yea and nay*, 2 Cor. i. 18. and, v. 23. *I call God for a record upon my soul. Before God, I lie not*, Gal. i. 20. *God is my record*, Phil. i. 8. *God is witness*, 1 Thess. ii. 5. These are all unquestionable oaths; which we cannot imagine St Paul would have used, had they been directly contrary to our Saviour's law. And whereas some defend this upon account of his extraordinary inspiration, I cannot possibly see how this mends the matter; for certainly it is very inconvenient to say, that they who were to teach the precepts of Christ to others, did themselves break them by inspiration.

But I go yet farther; and shall urge an example beyond all exception.

Our

Our Saviour himself, who surely would not be the first example of breaking his own laws, did not refuse to answer upon oath, being called thereto at his trial. So we find, Matth. xxvi. 63. *The High Priest said unto him, I adjure thee by the living God, that thou tell us, whether thou be the Christ the Son of God*; that is, he required him to answer this question upon oath: for, among the Jews, the form of giving an oath to witnesses, and others, was not by tendering a formal oath to them, as the custom is among us, but by adjuring them; that is, requiring them to answer upon oath: as is plain from Lev. v. 1. *If a man hear the voice of swearing, and is a witness, whether he hath seen or known of such a thing; if he do not utter it, then he shall bear his iniquity. If he hath heard the voice of swearing*; that is, if, being adjured or demanded to answer upon oath concerning what he hath seen or heard, he do not utter the truth, he is perjured. Now, to this adjuration of the High Priest our Saviour answered, *Thou hast said*: which words are not an avoiding to answer, as some have thought, but a direct answer; as if he had said, “It is as thou sayest; “It is even so; I am the Son of God:” for upon this answer the High Priest said, *He hath spoken blasphemy*. But, to put the matter beyond all doubt, St Mark tells us, Mark xiv. 61. that he being asked by the High Priest, *Art thou the Christ the son of the Blessed?* he answered, *I am*. So that, unless we will interpret our Saviour’s doctrine contrary to his own practice, we cannot understand him to forbid all oaths; and consequently they are not unlawful.

I have been the longer upon this, that I might give clear satisfaction in this matter to those that are willing to receive it.

As for the ceremonies in use among us in the taking of oaths, it is no just exception against them, that they are not found in scripture: for this was always matter of liberty; and several nations have used several rites and ceremonies in their oaths. It was the custom of the Grecians, to swear laying their hands upon the altar, *quod sanctissimum jusjurandum est habitum*, (saith A. Gellius): “which was looked upon as the most sacred form of swearing.” The Romans were wont *Jovem lapidem*

lapidem jurare; that is, he that swore by Jupiter held a flint-stone in his hand, and flung it violently from him, with these words: *Si sciens fallo, ita me Jupiter bonis omnibus ejiciat, ut ego hunc lapidem*: “If I knowingly
“ falsify, God so throw me out of all my possessions, as
“ I do this stone.”

In scripture there are two ceremonies mentioned of swearing. One, of *putting the hand under the thigh* of him to whom the oath was made. Thus Eliezer swore to Abraham, Gen. xxiv. and Joseph to Jacob, Gen. xlvii. The other was, *by lifting up the hand to heaven*. Thus Abraham expresseth the manner of an oath, Gen. xiv. 22. *I have lift up my hand to the most high God*. And thus God, condescending to the manner of men, expresseth himself, Deut. xxxii. 40. *If I lift up my hand to heaven, and swear*. In allusion to this custom, the Psalmist describes the perjured person, Psal. cxliv. 8. *Whose mouth speaketh vanity; and whose right hand is a right hand of falsehood*. And there is not the least intimation in scripture, that either of these ceremonies were prescribed and appointed by God, but voluntarily instituted and taken up by men. And thus, among us, the ceremony of swearing is, by laying the hand on the holy gospel, and kissing the book; which is both very solemn and significant. And this is the reason why this solemn kind of oath is called a *corporal oath*, and was anciently so called; because the sign or ceremony of it is performed by some part of the body. And this solemnity is an aggravation of the perjury; because it makes it both more deliberate and more scandalous.

I shall speak but briefly to the

IV. And last particular, *viz.* the sacred obligation of an oath; because it is a solemn appeal to God as a witness of the truth of what we say: to God, I say, from whose piercing and all-seeing eye, from whose perfect and infinite knowledge, nothing is, or can be hid; so that there is not a thought in our heart but he sees it, nor a word in our tongue but he discerns the truth or falsehood of it. Whenever we swear, we appeal to his knowledge, and refer ourselves to his just judgement, who is the powerful patron and protector of right, and the almighty judge and avenger of all falsehood and unrighteousness:

teousness : so that it is not possible for men to lay a more sacred and solemn obligation upon their consciences, than by the religion of an oath. Moses very well expresseth it, by *binding our souls with a bond*, Num. xxx. 2. *If a man swear an oath, to bind his soul with a bond* : intimating, that he that swears lays the strongest obligation upon himself, and puts his soul in pawn for the truth of what he says. And this obligation no man can violate, but at the utmost peril of the judgement and vengeance of God : for every oath implies a curse upon ourselves in case of perjury, as Plutarch observes. And this was always the sense of mankind concerning the obligation of oaths. *Nullum vinculum ad astringendam fidem majores nostri jurejurando arctius esse voluerunt*, saith Tully : “ Our forefathers had no stricter bond whereby to oblige “ the faith of men to one another, than that of an oath.” To the same purpose is that in the Comedian : *Aliud si scirem, quo firmare meam apud vos possem fidem, sanctius quam jusjurandum, id pollicerer tibi* : “ If I knew any “ thing more sacred than an oath, whereby to confirm “ to you the truth of what I say, I would make use of it.”

I will crave your patience a little longer, whilst, by way of inference from this discourse, I represent to you the great sin of swearing in common conversation, upon trivial and needless occasions, and the heinousness of the sin of perjury.

I. The great sin of swearing upon trivial and needless occasions in common conversation ; because an oath is a solemn thing, and reserved for great occasions, to give confirmation to our word in some weighty matter, and to put an end to controversies which cannot otherwise be peremptorily and satisfactorily decided. And therefore to use oaths upon light occasions argues great profaneness, and irreverence of Almighty God. So Ulpian, the great Roman lawyer, observes, *Nonnullos esse faciles ad jurandum contemptu religionis* : “ That mens proneness “ to swearing comes from a contempt of religion.” Than which nothing disposeth men more to Atheism and infidelity. Besides that it doth many times surprise men unawares into perjury. And how can it be otherwise, when men use to interlard all their careless talk with oaths, but that they must often be perjured ? And, which is worse,

it prepares men for deliberate perjury ; for with those who are accustomed to swear upon light occasions, an oath will go off with them more roundly about weightier matters. “ From a common custom of swearing (saith Hierocles) men easily slide into perjury ; therefore (says he) if thou wouldst not be perjured, do not use to swear.” And this perhaps is the meaning of St James, when he cautions Christians so vehemently against common swearing, *ἵνα μὴ εἰς ὑποκρισιν πέσῃτε*, (for so some of the best ancient copies read it), *lest ye fall into hypocrisy* ; that is, lest ye lie, and be perjured, by using yourselves to rash and inconsiderate swearing.

And men expose themselves to this danger to no purpose ; oaths in common discourse being so far from confirming a man’s word, that with wise men they much weaken it. For common swearing, if it have any serious meaning at all, argues in a man a perpetual distrust of his own reputation, and is an acknowledgement that he thinks his bare word not to be worthy of credit. And it is so far from adorning and filling a man’s discourse, that it makes it look swollen and bloated, and more bold and blustering than becomes persons of genteel and good breeding. Besides that it is a great incivility ; because it highly offends and grates upon all sober and considerate persons ; who cannot be presumed, with any manner of ease and patience, to hear God affronted, and his great and glorious name so irreverently tossed upon every slight occasion.

And it is no excuse to men, that many times they do it ignorantly, and not observing and knowing what they do. For certainly it is no extenuation of a fault, that a man hath got the habit of it so perfect, that he commits it when he does not think of it. Which consideration should make men oppose the beginning of this vice, lest it grow into a habit very hard to be left. *Nemo novit, nisi qui expertus est, quam sit difficile consuetudinem jurandi extinguere*, saith St Austin : “ No man knows, but he that hath tried, how hard it is to get rid of this custom of swearing.” But yet it is certain men may do it, by resolution, and great care of themselves. For he that can chuse whether he will speak or not, can chuse

whether he will swear or not when he speaks. *Major consuetudo majorem intentionem flagitat* : “ The more inveterate a custom is, the greater care should be used to break ourselves off it.”

In short, this practice is so contrary to so plain a precept of our Saviour, and by the breach whereof we incur so great a danger, as St James assures us, that it must be a great charity that can find out a way to reconcile a common custom of swearing with a serious belief of the Christian religion. Which I would to God those who are concerned would seriously lay to heart ; especially, since this sin, of all others, hath the least of temptation to it. Profit or pleasure there is none in it, nor any thing in mens natural tempers to incite them to it. For though some men pour out oaths so freely, as if they came naturally from them, yet surely no man is born of a swearing constitution.

All that can be pretended for it, is custom and fashion. But to shew that this is no excuse, it is very observable, that it is particularly in the matter of oaths and perjury that the Holy Ghost gives that caution, *Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil.*

And, lastly, it deserves to be considered, that this sin is so much the greater, because of the frequent returns of it in those that are accustomed to it. So that, although it were but small in itself, as it is not ; yet the frequent practice of this sin would quickly mount it up to a greater score.

2. To represent the heinousness of the sin of perjury. But, before I aggravate this crime, it is fit to let men know how many ways they may be guilty of it.

1st, When a man asserts upon oath what he knows to be otherwise ; or promiseth what he does not intend to perform. In both these cases the very act of swearing is perjury. And so likewise when a man promiseth upon oath to do that which is unlawful for him to do, because this oath is contrary to a former obligation.

2^{dly}, When a man is uncertain whether what he swear to, be true. This likewise is perjury in the act ; though not of the same degree of guilt with the former, because it is not so fully and directly against his knowledge and conscience. For men ought to be certain of the truth of
what

what they assert upon oath, and not swear at a venture. And therefore no man ought positively to swear to the truth of any thing, but what he himself hath seen or heard; this being the highest assurance men are capable of in this world. In like manner, he is guilty of perjury in the same degree, who promiseth upon oath what he is not morally and reasonably certain he shall be able to perform.

3dly, They are likewise guilty of perjury, who do not use great plainness and simplicity in oaths; but answer equivocally and doubtfully, or with reservation of something in their minds, thinking thereby to save the truth of what they say. And we all know who they are that make use of these arts, and maintain them to be lawful, to the infinite scandal of the Christian religion, and prejudice of human society; by doing what in them lies to destroy all faith and mutual confidence among men. For what can be a greater affront to God, than to use his name to deceive men? and what can more directly overthrow the great end and use of oaths, which are *for confirmation*, and to *put an end to strife*? whereas, by these arts, the thing is left in the same uncertainty it was before, and there is no decision of it. For there is hardly any form of words can be devised so plain, as not to be liable to equivocation: to be sure, a man when he swears, may always reserve something in his mind which will quite alter the sense of whatever he can say or promise upon oath. And this may be laid down for a certain rule, That all departure from the simplicity of an oath, is a degree of perjury; and a man is never a whit the less forsworn, because his perjury is a little finer and more artificial than ordinary. And tho' men think by this device to save themselves harmless from the guilt of so great a sin, they do really increase it, by adding to their iniquity the impudent folly of mocking God, and deceiving themselves.

And whereas it is pleaded in the favour of mental reservation, That the whole proposition, as made up of what is expressed in words, and of that which is reserved in the mind, is true: for instance, If a man, being asked upon oath, Whether he be a priest? shall answer, he is not, reserving in his mind, that he is not a priest of

Bacchus, or some such thing; the whole proposition is true: and then, they say, a man may swear to that which is true, without danger of perjury: this is of no force; because, though the whole proposition be true, it is deceitful, and contrary to that sincerity which ought to be in an oath. And the end of an oath is hereby likewise defeated; which is, to ascertain the truth of what we say: but if a man reserve something in his mind which alters the truth of what he says, the thing is still as doubtful and uncertain as it was before. Besides, if this be a good reason, a man may swear with reservation in all cases; because the reason equally extends to all cases: for if the truth of the proposition, as made up of what is expressed in words, and reserved in the mind, will excuse a man from perjury; then no man can be perjured that swears with reservation. But this the casuists of the Roman church do not allow, but only in some particular cases; as before an incompetent judge, or the like: for they see well enough, that, if this were allowed in all cases, it would destroy all faith among men. And therefore, since the reason extends alike to all cases, it is plain that it is to be allowed in none.

4thly, He is guilty of perjury after the act, who having a real intention when he swears, to perform what he promiseth, yet afterwards neglects to do it; not for want of power, (for so long as that continues, the obligation ceaseth), but for want of will, and due regard to his oath.

Now, that perjury is a most heinous sin, is evident, because it is contrary to so plain and great a law of God; one of the ten words or precepts of the moral law: *Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain*: thou shalt not bring or apply the name of God to a falsehood; or, as Josephus renders it, *Thou shalt not adjure God to a false thing*: which our Saviour renders yet more plainly, Matth. v. 33. *Thou shalt not forswear thyself*. For he seems to refer to the third commandment, when he says, *ye have heard that it was said to them of old time, Thou shalt not forswear thyself*, as he had done before to the 6th and 7th, when he says, *It was said to them of old time, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not commit adultery*. So that the primary, if not the sole intention of this

this law, *Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain*, is to forbid the great sin of perjury. And I do not remember that in scripture the phrase of *taking God's name in vain*, is used in any other sense. And thus it is certainly used, Prov. xxx. 9. *Lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of the Lord my God in vain; i. e.* lest poverty should tempt me to steal, and stealth should engage me in perjury. For among the Jews an oath was tendered to him that was suspected of theft, as appears from Lev. vi. 2. &c.; where it is said, *If any one be guilty of theft, and lieth concerning it, or sweareth falsely, he shall restore all that about which he hath sworn falsely. Lest I steal, and take the name of the Lord my God in vain*; that is, be perjured, being examined upon oath, concerning a thing stolen. And for this reason the thief and the perjured person are put together, Zech. v. 4.; where it is said, that *a curse shall enter into the house of the thief, and of him that sweareth falsely by the name of God*. From all which it is very probable, that the whole intention of the third commandment is to forbid this great sin of perjury. To deter men from which, a severe threatening is there added, *For the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain*; that is, he will most severely punish such a one. And it is very observable, that there is no threatening added to any other commandment, but to this and the second; intimating to us, that, next to idolatry, and the worship of a false God, perjury is one of the greatest affronts that can be offered to the divine Majesty. This is one of those sins that cry so loud to heaven, and quicken the pace of God's judgements: Mal. iii. 5. *I will come near to you in judgement, and be a swift witness against the swearer*. For this God threatens utter destruction to the man and his house, Zech. v. 4. speaking of the curse that goeth over the face of the whole earth: God, says he, *will bring it forth, and it shall enter into the house of him that sweareth falsely by the name of God, and shall remain in the midst of his house, and shall consume it, with the timber thereof, and the stones thereof. It shall remain in the midst of his house, and shall consume it*: This sin, by the secret judgement of God, undermines estates and families, to the utter ruin of them.

And

And among the Heathen it was always reckoned one of the greatest of crimes, and which they did believe God did not only punish upon the guilty person himself, but upon his family and posterity; and many times upon whole nations; as the Prophet also tells us, that *because of oaths the land mourns*.

I need not use many words to aggravate this sin. It is certainly a crime of the highest nature; deliberate perjury being directly against a man's knowledge; so that no man can commit it without staring his conscience in the face; which is one of the greatest aggravations of any crime. And it is equally a sin against both tables; being the highest affront to God, and of most injurious consequence to men. It is an horrible abuse of the name of God, an open contempt of his judgement, and an insolent defiance of his vengeance. And, in respect of men, it is not only a wrong to this or that particular person who suffers by it, but treason against human society; subverting at once the foundations of public peace and justice, and the private security of every man's life and fortune. It is a defeating of the best and last way that the wisdom of men could devise for the decision of doubtful matters. Solomon very fully and elegantly expresseth the destructive nature of this sin, Prov. xxv. 18. *A false witness against his neighbour, is a maul, and a sword, and a sharp arrow*; intimating, that, amongst all the instruments of ruin and mischief that have been devised by mankind, none is of more pernicious consequence to human society, than perjury, and breach of faith. It is a *pestilence that usually walketh in darkness*, and a secret stab and blow; against which, many times, there is no possibility of defence.

And therefore it highly concerns those who, upon these and the like occasions, are called upon their oath, whether as jurors or witnesses, to set God before their eyes, and to have his fear in their hearts, whenever they come to take an oath; and to govern and discharge their consciences in this matter by known and approved rules, and by the resolutions of pious and wise men, and not by the loose reasonings and resolutions of pamphlets, sent abroad to serve the turns of unpeaceable and ill-minded men, whether Atheists or Papists, or others, on purpose

purpose to debauch the consciences of men, by teaching them to play fast and loose with oaths. And it is a very sad sign of the decay of Christian religion among us, to see so many who calls themselves Christians, to make so little conscience of so great a sin, as even the light of nature would blush and tremble at.

I will conclude all with those excellent sayings of the son of Sirach concerning these two sins I have been speaking of, profane swearing, and perjury: Eccclus xxiii. 9. 11. *Ec. Accustom not thy mouth to swearing: neither use thyself to the naming of the Holy One. A man that useth much swearing shall be filled with iniquity, and the plague shall never depart from his house: if he shall offend, his sin shall be upon him: and if he acknowledge not his sin, he maketh a double offence; and if he swear falsely, he shall not be innocent, but his house shall be full of calamities.* And to represent to us the dreadful nature of this sin of perjury: *There is, saith he, a word that is clothed about with death, meaning a rash and false oath. There is a word that is clothed about with death: God grant it be not found in the heritage of Jacob, for all such things shall be far from the godly, and they will not wallow in these sins.* From which God preserve all good men, and make them careful to preserve themselves; as they value the present peace of their own consciences, and the favour of Almighty God, in this world and the other, for his mercies sake in Jesus Christ. To whom, &c.

SERMON

S E R M O N XXIII.

Preached at the funeral of the Reverend Mr Thomas Gouge, the 4th of November 1681, at St Anne's, Blackfriars. With a brief account of his life.

The EPISTLE DEDICATORY.

To the Right Worshipful, the President, the Treasurer, and the rest of the worthy Governors, of the Hospital of CHRIST-CHURCH in London.

WHen, upon the request of some of the relations and friends of the Reverend Mr Gouge, deceased, and, to speak the truth, in compliance with mine own inclination to do right to the memory of so good a man, and to set so great an example in the view of all men, I had determined to make this discourse public; I knew not where more fitly to address it, than to yourselves, who are the living pattern of the same virtue, and the faithful dispensers and managers of one of the best and greatest charities in the world: especially since he had a particular relation to you, and was pleased for some years last past, without any other consideration but that of charity, to employ his constant pains in catechising the poor children of your hospital; wisely considering of how great consequence it was to this city, to have the foundations of religion well laid in the tender years of so many persons as were afterwards to be planted there in several professions; and from a true humility of mind, being ready to stoop to the meanest office and service to do good.

I have heard from an intimate friend of his, that he would sometimes with great pleasure say, that he had two livings which he would not exchange for two of the greatest in England, meaning Wales and Christ's hospital. Contrary to common account, he esteemed every advantage of being useful and serviceable to God and men a rich benefice,

fice, and those his best patrons and benefactors, not who did him good, but who gave him the opportunity and means of doing it. To you, therefore, as his patrons, this sermon doth of right belong; and to you I humbly dedicate it; heartily beseeching Almighty God to raise up many, by his example, that may serve their generation according to the will of God, as he did. I am

Your faithful and humble servant,

JO. TILLOTSON.

THE S E R M O N.

LUKE XX. 37. 38.

Now that the dead are raised, even Moses shewed at the bush, when he calleth the Lord the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. For he is not a God of the dead, but of the living: for all live to him.

THE occasion of these words of our blessed Saviour was an objection which the Sadducees made against the resurrection, grounded upon a case which had sometimes happened among them, of a woman that had had seven brethren successively to her husbands. Upon which case they put this question to our Saviour, *Whose wife of the seven shall this woman be at the resurrection?* that is, If men live in another world, how shall the controversy between these seven brethren be decided? for they all seem to have an equal claim to this woman, each of them having had her to wife.

This captious question was not easy to be answered by the Pharisees, who fancied the enjoyments of the next life to be of the same kind with the sensual pleasures of this world, only greater and more durable. From which tradition of the Jews concerning a sensual paradise, Mahomet seems to have taken the pattern of his; as he did likewise many other things from the Jewish traditions. Now, upon this supposition, that in the next life there will be marrying and giving in marriage, it was a question

tion not easily satisfied, *Whose wife of the seven this woman should then be?*

But our Saviour clearly avoids the whole force of it, by shewing the different state of men in this world, and in the other: *The children of this world, says he, marry, and are given in marriage; but they who shall be accounted worthy to obtain that world, and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry, nor are given in marriage.* And he does not barely and magisterially assert this doctrine, but gives a plain and substantial reason for it; because *they cannot die any more.* After men have lived a while in this world, they are taken away by death, and therefore marriage is necessary to maintain a succession of mankind; but in the other world men shall become immortal, and live for ever; and then the reason of marriage will wholly cease: for when men can die no more, there will then be no need of any new supplies of mankind.

Our Saviour having thus cleared himself of this objection, by taking away the ground and foundation of it, he produceth an argument for the proof of the resurrection, in the words of my text: *Now that the dead are raised, Moses even shewed at the bush, when he calleth the Lord the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob;* that is, when in one of his books God is brought in speaking to him out of the bush, and calling himself by the title of *the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.* From whence our Saviour infers the resurrection; because *God is not the God of the dead, but of the living: for all live to him.*

My design from these words is, to show the force and strength of this argument which our Saviour urgeth for the proof of the resurrection. In order whereunto I shall,

1. Consider it as an argument *ad hominem*; and shew the fitness and force of it to convince those with whom our Saviour disputed.

2. I shall inquire, Whether it be more than an argument *ad hominem*? And if it be, wherein the real and absolute force of it doth consist?

And then I shall apply this doctrine of the resurrection to the present occasion.

I. We will consider it as an argument *ad hominem*; and shew

shew the fitness and force of it to convince those with whom our Saviour disputed. And this will appear, if we carefully consider these four things.

1. What our Saviour intended directly and immediately to prove by this argument.

2. The extraordinary veneration which the Jews in general had for the writings of Moses above any other books of the Old Testament.

3. The peculiar notion which the Jews had concerning the use of this phrase or expression of *God's being any one's God*.

4. The great respect which the Jews had for these three fathers of their nation, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. For each of these make our Saviour's argument more forcible against those with whom he disputed.

1. We will consider what our Saviour intended directly and immediately to prove by this argument; and that was this, That there is another state after this life, wherein men shall be happy or miserable according as they have lived in this world. And this doth not only suppose the immortality of the soul, but, forasmuch as the body is an essential part of man, doth by consequence infer the resurrection of the body; because otherwise the man would not be happy or miserable in the other world. But I cannot see any sufficient ground to believe, that our Saviour intended by this argument directly and immediately to prove the resurrection of the body; but only by consequence, and as it follows from the admission of a future state wherein men shall be rewarded or punished. For that reason of our Saviour, that *God is not a God of the dead, but of the living*, if it did directly prove the resurrection of the body, it would prove that the bodies of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were raised to life again, at or before that time when God spake unto Moses, and called himself the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob: but we do not believe this; and therefore ought not to suppose, that it was the intention of our Saviour directly and immediately to prove the resurrection of the body, but only, as I said before, a future state. And that this was all our Saviour intended, will more plainly appear, if we consider what the error of the Sadducees was which our Saviour here confutes. And Josephus, who

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very well understood the difference of the sects among the Jews, and gives a particular account of them, makes not the least mention of any controversy between the Pharisees and the Sadducees about the resurrection of the body. All that he says is this, That the Pharisees hold the immortality of the soul, and that there are rewards and punishments in another world : but the Sadducees denied all this ; and that there was any other state after this life. And this is the very same account with that which is given of them in the New Testament, ver. 27. of this chapter, *the Sadducees who deny that there is any resurrection* : the meaning of which is more fully declared, Acts xxiii. 8. *The Sadducees say, that there is no resurrection, neither angel nor spirit ; but the Pharisees confess both* : that is, the Sadducees denied that there was any other state of men after this life ; and that there was any such thing as an immortal spirit, either angels, or the souls of men surviving their bodies. And, as Dr Hammond hath judiciously observed, this is the true importance of the word *ἀναστάσις*, viz. *a future, or another state* ; unless in such texts where the context does restrain it to the rising again of the body, or where some word that denotes the *body*, as *σώματος*, or *σαρκός*, is added to it.

2. The force of this argument against those with whom our Saviour disputed, will farther appear, if we consider the great veneration which the Jews in general had for the writings of Moses above any other books of the Old Testament ; which they, especially the Sadducees, looked upon only as explications and comments upon the law of Moses : but they esteemed nothing as a necessary article of faith which had not some foundation in the writings of Moses. And this seems to me to be the true reason why our Saviour chose to confute them out of Moses, rather than any other part of the Old Testament ; and not, as many learned men have imagined, because the Sadducees did not receive any part of the Old Testament, but only the five books of Moses ; so that it was in vain to argue against them out of any other. This I know hath been a general opinion, grounded I think upon the mistake of a passage in Josephus, who says, “ The Sadducees only receive the written law.” But, if we carefully

carefully consider that passage, we shall find that Josephus doth not there oppose the law to the other books of the Old Testament, which were also written, but to oral tradition: for he says expressly, that “the Sadducees
“only received the written law; but the Pharisees, o-
“ver and besides what was written, received the oral,
“which they call tradition.”

I deny not, but that in the later prophets there are more express texts for the proof a future state, than any are to be found in the books of Moses; as Daniel, xii. 2. *And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.* And indeed it seems very plain, that holy men among the Jews, towards the expiration of the legal dispensation, had still clearer and more express apprehensions concerning a future state, than are to be met with in the writings of Moses, or of any of the prophets.

The law given by Moses did suppose the immortality of the souls of men, and the expectation of another life after this, as principles of religion in some degree naturally known; but made no new and express revelation of these things. Nor was there any occasion for it; the law of Moses being a political law, not intended for the government of mankind, but of one particular nation; and therefore was established, as political laws are, upon temporal promises and threatenings; promising temporal prosperity to the observation of its precepts, and threatening the breach of them with temporal judgements and calamities.

And this I take to be the true reason why arguments fetched from another world, are so obscurely insisted upon under that dispensation: not but that another life after this was always supposed, and was undoubtedly the hope and expectation of good men under the law; but the clear discovery of it was reserved for the times of the Messias. And therefore, as those times drew on, and the *sun of righteousness* was near his rising, the shadows of the night began to be chased away, and mens apprehensions of a future state to clear up; so that in the time of the Maccabees good men spake with more confidence and assurance of these things.

It is likewise to be considered, that the temporal calamities and sufferings with which the Jews were almost continually harrassed from the time of their captivity, had very much weaned good men from the consideration of temporal promises, and awakened their minds to the more serious thoughts of another world: it being natural to men, when they are destitute of present comfort, to support themselves with the expectation of better things for the future: and, as the Apostle to the Hebrews expresseth it, chap. vi. v. 18. *to fly for refuge to lay hold upon the hope that is before them*, and to employ their reason to fortify themselves as well as they can in that persuasion.

And this I doubt not was the true occasion of those clearer and riper apprehensions of good men concerning a future state in those times of distress and persecution: it being very agreeable to the wisdom and goodness of the divine providence, not to leave his people destitute of sufficient support under great trials and sufferings; and nothing but the hopes of a better life could have borne up the spirits of men under such cruel tortures. And of this we have a most remarkable instance in the history of the seven brethren in the Maccabees; who, being cruelly tortured and put to death by Antiochus, do most expressly declare their confident expectation of a resurrection to a better life. To which history the Apostle certainly refers, Heb. xi. 35. when he says, *Others we tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection*. Where the word which we render *were tortured*, is, *ἐτυμπανίσθησαν*, which is the very word used in the Maccabees to express the particular kind of torture used upon them; besides that, being *offered deliverance*, they most resolutely *refused to accept* of it; with this express declaration, that they hoped for a *resurrection to a better life*.

But to return to my purpose: Notwithstanding there might be more clear and express texts to this purpose in the ancient prophets; yet our Saviour knowing how great a regard, not only the Sadducees, but all the Jews, had to the authority of Moses, he thought fit to bring his proof of the resurrection out of his writings, as that which was the most likely to convince them.

3. If we consider farther the peculiar notion which the Jews had concerning the use of this phrase or expression of *God's being any one's God*; and that was this: That God is no where in scripture said to be any one's God while he was alive: and therefore they tell us, that while Isaac lived, God is not called the *God of Isaac*, but the *fear of Isaac*; as Gen. xxxi. 42. *Except the God of Abraham, and the fear of Isaac, had been with me*; and, ver. 53. when Laban made a covenant with Jacob, it is said, that *Laban did swear by the God of Abraham, and the God of Nahor, and the God of their father*; but Jacob swore *by the fear of his father Isaac*. I will not warrant this observation to be good, because I certainly know it is not true: for God doth expressly call himself the *God of Isaac*, while Isaac was yet alive, Gen. xxviii. 13. *I am the Lord God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac*. It is sufficient to my purpose, that this was a notion anciently current among the Jews. And therefore our Saviour's argument from this expression must be so much the stronger against them: for, if the souls of men be extinguished by death, as the Sadducees believed, what did it signify to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to have God called *their God*, after they were dead? But surely, for God to be *any one's God*, doth signify some great benefit and advantage; which yet, according to the notion which the Jews had of this phrase, could not respect this life; because, according to them, God is not said to be *any one's God* till after he is dead. But it is thus said of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, after their death; and therefore our Saviour infers very strongly against them, that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, were not extinguished by death, but do still live some where; for *God is not the God of the dead, but of the living*; and then he adds, by way of further explication, *For all live to him*; that is, though those good men who are departed this life, do not still live to us here in this world, yet they live to God, and are with him.

4. If we consider the great respect which the Jews had for those three fathers of their nation, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. They had an extraordinary opinion of them, and esteemed nothing too great to be thought or said of them. And therefore we find, that they looked upon it

as a great arrogance for any man to assume any thing to himself, that might seem to set him above Abraham, Isaac, or Jacob. With what indignation did they fly upon our Saviour on this account? John iv. 12. *Art thou greater than our father Jacob?* and chap. viii. v. 53. *Art thou greater than our father Abraham? whom makest thou thyself?* Now, they who had so superstitious a veneration for them, would easily believe any thing of privilege to belong to them: so that our Saviour doth, with great advantage, instance in them, in favour of whom they would be inclined to extend the meaning of any promise to the utmost, and allow it to signify as much as the words could possibly bear. So that it is no wonder that the text tells us, that this argument put the Sadducees to silence. They durst not attempt a thing so odious, as to go about to take away any thing of privilege from Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

And thus I have, as briefly as the matter would bear, endeavoured to shew the fitness and force of this argument to convince those with whom our Saviour disputed. I come now, in the

II. Second place, to inquire, Whether this be any more than an argument *ad hominem*? and if it be, wherein the real and absolute force of it doth consist?

I do not think it necessary to believe, that every argument used by our Saviour, or his apostles, is absolutely and in itself conclusive of the matter in debate. For an argument which doth not really prove the thing in question, may yet be a very good argument *ad hominem*; and in some cases more convincing to him with whom we dispute, than that which is a better argument in itself. Now, it is possible that our Saviour's intention might not be to bring a conclusive proof of the resurrection, but only to confute those who would needs be disputing with him: and, to that purpose, an argument *ad hominem*, which proceeded upon grounds which they themselves could not deny, might be very proper and effectual. But although it be not necessary to believe, that this was more than argument *ad hominem*; yet it is the better to us, if it be absolutely and in itself conclusive of the thing in question. And this I hope will sufficiently appear, if we consider these four things.

I. That

1. That for God to be *any one's God*, doth signify some very extraordinary blessing and happiness to those persons of whom this is said.

2. If we consider the eminent faith and obedience of the persons to whom this promise is made.

3. Their condition in this world.

4. The general importance of this promise, abstracting from the persons particularly specified and named in it, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

1. If we consider, that for God to be *any one's God*, doth signify some very extraordinary blessing and happiness to those persons of whom this is said. It is a big word for God to declare himself to be *any one's God*: and the least we can imagine to be meant by it is, that God will in an extraordinary manner employ his power and wisdom to do him good; that he will concern himself more for the happiness of those whose God he declares himself to be, than for others.

2. If we consider the eminent faith and obedience of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Abraham left his country in obedience to God, not knowing whither he was to go. And, which was one of the most unparalleled and strange instances of faith and obedience that can almost be imagined, he was willing to have sacrificed his only son at the command of God. Isaac and Jacob were also very good men, and devout worshippers of the true God, when almost the whole world was sunk into idolatry and all manner of impiety. Now, what can we imagine, but that the good God did design some extraordinary reward to such faithful servants of his? especially if we consider, that he intended this gracious declaration of his concerning them, for a standing encouragement to all those who in after ages should follow the faith, and tread in the steps of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

3. If we consider the condition of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in this world. The scripture tells us, that *they were pilgrims and strangers upon the earth*; had no fixed and settled habitation, but were forced to wander from one kingdom and country to another; that they were exposed to many hazards and difficulties, to great troubles and afflictions in this world; so that there was no such peculiar happiness befall them in this life above the
common

common rate of men, as may seem to fill up the big words of this promise, That *God would be their God*. For, so far as the scripture history informs us, and further we cannot know of this matter, Esau was as prosperous as Jacob, and Jacob had a great many more troubles and afflictions in this life than Esau had. But surely when God calls himself *the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob*, this signifies, that God intended some very peculiar blessing and advantage to them above others; which seeing they did not enjoy in this world, it is very reasonable to believe, that one time or other this gracious declaration and promise of God was made good to them.

And therefore the Apostle to the Hebrews, chap. xi. from this very expression of God's being said *to be the God of Abraham*, and others, argues, that some extraordinary happiness was reserved for them in another world; and that upon this very ground I am now speaking of, namely, because the condition of Abraham, and some others, was not such in this world as might seem to answer the fulness of this promise: *All these*, says he, *died in the faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims upon the earth*. From whence he reasons very strongly, that these good men might reasonably expect something better than any thing that had befallen them in this world: *For they*, says he, *that say such things, declare plainly that they seek a country*; which, at ver. 16. he calls *a better country, that is, a heavenly*. *They that say such things*; that is, they who acknowledge themselves to be strangers and pilgrims in the earth, and yet pretend that God had promised *to be their God*, declare plainly, that they expect some reward beyond this life. From all which he concludes, *Wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, because he hath prepared for them a city*; intimating, that, if no happiness had remained for these good men in another world, this promise, of God's being *their God*, would shamefully have fallen short of what it seemed to import, viz. some extraordinary reward and blessing worthy of God to bestow; something more certain and lasting than any of the enjoyments of this world;

world ; which since God had abundantly performed to them in the happiness of another life, his promise to them was made good to the full ; and he needed not be *ashamed to be called their God*. But, if nothing beyond this life had been reserved for them, that saying of old Jacob, towards the conclusion of his life, *Few and evil have the days of the years of my life been*, would have been an eternal reflection upon the truth and faithfulness of him who had so often called himself *the God of Jacob*.

But now, because to all this it may be said, that this promise seems to have been made good to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, in this world : for was not God the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, when he took such a particular and extraordinary care of them, and protected them from the manifold dangers they were exposed to, by such a special and immediate providence, *suffering no one to do them harm, but rebuking even kings for their sakes* ? was not he Abraham's God, when he blessed him so miraculously with a son in his old age, and with so considerable an estate to leave to him ? was not that saying of Jacob a great acknowledgement of the gracious providence of God towards him, *With my staff passed I over this Jordan, and now I am become two bands* ? and though it must needs be a very cutting affliction to him to lose his son Joseph, as he thought he had done ; yet that was more than recompensed to him in Joseph's strange advancement in Egypt, whereby God put into his hands the opportunity of saving his father and his whole family alive : and was not God the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, in making them fathers of so numerous an offspring, as afterwards became a great nation ? and in giving them a fruitful land ? and bringing them to the quiet possession of it by such a series of wonderful miracles ? what need then is there of extending this promise to another world ? doth it not seem abundantly made good in those great blessings which God bestowed upon them whilst they lived, and afterwards upon their posterity in this world ? and does not this agree well enough with the first and most obvious sense of these words, *I am the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob* ? that is, I am he that was their God while they were alive, and am still the God of their posterity for
their

their fakes: I say, because the three former considerations are liable to this objection, which seems wholly to take off the force of this argument; therefore, for the full clearing of this matter, I will add one consideration more.

4. Then we will consider the general importance of this promise, abstracting from the particular persons specified and named in it, viz. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; and that is, that God will make a wide and plain difference between good and bad men. He will be so the God of good men, as he is not of the wicked; and some time or other put every good man into a better and happier condition than any wicked man. So that the general importance of this promise is finally resolved into the equity and justice of the divine providence.

And, unless we suppose another life after this, it will certainly be very hard, and I think impossible, to reconcile the history of the Old Testament, and the common appearances of things in this world, with the justice and goodness of God's providence.

It cannot be denied, but that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and several good men in the Old Testament, had many signal testimonies of the divine favour vouchsafed to them in this world; but we read likewise of several wicked men that had as large a share of temporal blessings. It is very true, that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, had great estates, and were petty princes: but Pharaoh was a mighty prince in comparison of them. And the kingdom of Egypt, which probably was the first and chief seat of idolatry, was at the same time one of the most potent and flourishing kingdoms in the world; and was blessed with a prodigious plenty, whereby they were furnished with store of corn, when good Jacob and his family had like to have perished by famine. It is true, Joseph was advanced to great power in Egypt, and thereby had the opportunity of saving his father's house, by settling them and feeding them in Egypt. But then it is to be considered again, that this cost them very dear; and their coming thither was the occasion of a long and cruel bondage to Jacob's posterity: so that we see that these good men had no such blessings, but what were common with them to many others that were wicked.

And

And the blessings which God bestowed upon them, had great abatements by the intermixture of many and fore afflictions.

It seems then, upon the whole matter, to be very plain, that the providences of God in this world towards good men are so contrived, that it may sufficiently appear, to those who wisely consider the works of God, that they are not neglected by him; and yet that these outward blessings are so promiscuously dispensed, that no man can certainly be concluded to be a good man from any happiness he enjoys in this life. And the prosperity of good men is usually on purpose so shadowed and mixed with afflictions, as may justly raise their hopes to the expectation of a more perfect happiness, and better reward than any they meet with in this world.

And if so, then the general importance of this promise, that God *will be the God* of good men, must necessarily signify something beyond this world; because, in this world, there is not that clear difference universally made between good and bad men which the justice of the divine providence doth require, and which seems to be intended in the general sense of this promise. For if this promise, though personally made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, be intended, as the scripture tells us it was, for a standing encouragement to good men in all ages, then it must contain in it this general truth, That God will some time or other plentifully reward every good man: that is, he will do something far better for him than for any wicked man. But if there be no life after this, it is impossible to reconcile this sense of it with the course of God's providence, and with the history of the Bible.

And, to make this out fully, and at once, I will only produce that single instance of Abel and Cain. Abel offered to God *a more excellent sacrifice than Cain*; and he *had this testimony, that he pleased God*; which was in effect to declare, that God was the God of Abel, and not of Cain: so that, by virtue of the general importance of this promise, it might justly be expected, that Abel's condition should have been much better than Cain's. But if there be no happiness after this life, Abel's was evidently much worse. For upon this very account, that *he pleased God better*, he was killed by Cain, who

who had offered to God a slight and contemptuous offering. And Cain lived a long time after, and grew great, and built cities. Now, supposing there were no other life after this, this must have been a most horrible example to all ages, from the beginning of the world to the end of it, and have made men for ever afraid to please God upon such hard terms; when they were sure of no other reward for so doing, but to be oppressed and slain by the hands of the wicked. So that, if this were really the case, it would puzzle all the wit and reason of mankind, to vindicate the equity and justice of the divine providence, and to rescue it out of the hands of this terrible objection.

And thus have I, as briefly as I could, endeavoured to clear to you the force of this argument used by our Saviour for the proof of the resurrection: and have the longer insisted upon it, because, at first appearance, it seems to be but a very obscure and remote argument; and yet so much the more necessary to be cleared, because this, in all probability, was that very text upon which the Jews in our Saviour's time grounded their belief of a future state, in opposition to the error of the Sadducees; and which they called, by way of eminency, *the promise made of God unto the fathers*: as will plainly appear, if we consider what St Paul says to this purpose, when he appeals so often to the Pharisees for his agreement with them in this article of the resurrection, and likewise in the ground of it, from *the promise made of God unto the fathers*. Acts xxiv. 14. 15. *But this I confess unto thee, that after the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the law and the prophets: and have hope towards God, which they themselves also allow, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead.* From which it is clear, that they both grounded their hope of the resurrection upon something written in the law and the prophets; and what that was, he expresseth more particular, chap. xxvi. 6. 7. *And now I stand, and am judged for the hope of the promise made of God unto our fathers: unto which promise our twelve tribes, instantly serving God day and night, hope to come.* By the *promise made of God unto the fathers*, he means some promise made by God

God to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob : for so St Luke, more than once, in his history of the Acts, explains this phrase of *the God of their fathers* ; Acts iii. 13. *The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers* ; and chap. vii. 32. *I am the God of thy fathers, the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob*. Now, what was the great and famous promise which God made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob ? Was it not this, of being *their God* ? So that it was this very promise upon which St Paul tells us the Jews grounded their hope of a future state, because they understood it necessarily to signify some blessing and happiness beyond this life.

And now having, I hope, sufficiently cleared this matter, I shall make some improvement of this doctrine of a future state, and that to these three purposes.

I. To raise our minds above this world, and the enjoyments of this present life. Were but men thoroughly convinced of this plain and certain truth, that there is a vast difference between time and eternity, between a few years and everlasting ages ; would we but represent to ourselves what thoughts and apprehensions dying persons have of this world, how vain and empty a thing it appears to them, how like a pageant and a shadow it looks as it passeth away from them ; methinks none of these things could be a sufficient temptation to any man to forget God and his soul ; but, notwithstanding all the delights and pleasures of sense, we should be strangely intent upon the concernments of another world, and almost wholly taken up with the thoughts of that vast eternity which we are ready to launch into. For what is there in this world, this *waste and howling wilderness*, this rude and barbarous country which we are but to pass through, which should detain our affections here, and take off our thoughts from our everlasting habitation ; and from that *better and heavenly country*, where we hope to live and be happy for ever.

If we settle our affections upon the enjoyments of this present life, so as to be extremely pleased and transported with them, and say unto our hearts, *It is good for us to be here* ; if we be excessively grieved or discontented for the want or loss of them, and if we look upon our

present state in this world any otherwise than as a preparation and passage to a better life ; it is a sign that our faith and hope of the happiness of another life is but very weak and faint, and that we do not heartily and in good earnest believe what we pretend to do concerning these things. For did we steadfastly believe and were thoroughly persuaded of what our religion so plainly declares to us concerning the unspeakable and endless happiness of good men in another world, our affections would sit more loose to this world, and our hopes would raise our hearts as much above these present and sensible things, *as the heavens are high above the earth* ; we should value nothing here below, but as it serves for our present support and passage, or may be made a means to secure and increase our future felicity.

2. The consideration of another life should quicken our preparation for that blessed state which remains for us in the other world. This life is a state of probation and trial. This world is God's school, where immortal spirits, clothed with flesh, are trained and bred up for eternity. And then certainly it is not an indifferent thing, and a matter of slight concernment to us, how we live and demean ourselves in this world ; whether we indulge ourselves in *ungodliness and worldly lusts*, or *live soberly, and righteously, and godly in this present world*. No : it is a matter of infinite moment, as much as our souls and all eternity are worth. Let us not deceive ourselves : *For as we sow, so shall we reap. If we sow to the flesh, we shall of the flesh reap corruption : but if we sow to the spirit, we shall of the spirit reap everlasting life. Light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart. The righteous hath hope in his death. Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright, for the end of that man is peace.*

But the ungodly are not so. Whoever hath lived a wicked and vitious life, feels strange throws and pangs in his conscience when he comes to be cast upon a sick bed : *The wicked is like the troubled sea*, saith the prophet, *when it cannot rest* ; full of trouble and confusion, especially in a dying hour. It is death to such a man to look back upon his life, and a hell to him to think of eternity. When his guilty and trembling soul is ready to

to leave this body, and just stepping into the other world, what horror and amazement do then seize upon him? What a rage doth such a man feel in his breast, when he seriously considers, that he hath been so great a fool, as, for the false and imperfect pleasure of a few days, to make himself miserable for ever?

3. Let the consideration of the unspeakable reward which God hath promised to good men at the resurrection, encourage us to obedience and a holy life. We serve a great Prince, who is able to promote us to honour; a most gracious master, who will not let the least service we do for him pass unrewarded. This is the inference which the apostle makes from his large discourse of the doctrine of the resurrection, 1 Cor. xv. 58. *Wherefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, and immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour shall not be in vain in the Lord.* Nothing will make death more welcome to us, than a constant course of service and obedience to God. *Sleep, saith Solomon, is sweet to the labouring man;* so after a great diligence and industry in *working out our own salvation*, and (as it is said of David) *serving our generation according to the will of God*, how pleasant will it be to fall asleep? And as an useful and well spent life will make our death to be sweet, so our resurrection to be glorious. Whatever acts of piety we do to God, or of charity to men; whatever we lay out upon the poor, and afflicted, and necessitous, will all be considered by God in the day of recompences, and most plentifully rewarded to us.

And surely no consideration ought to be more prevalent to persuade us to alms-deeds and charity to the poor, than that of a resurrection to another life. Besides the promises of this life, which are made to works of charity, (and there is not any grace or virtue whatsoever which hath so many and so great promises of temporal blessings made to it in scripture as this grace of charity; I say, besides the promises of this life) the great promise of eternal life is in scripture in a more especial manner entailed upon it: Luke xii. 33. *Give alms, saith our Saviour: provide yourselves bags which wax not old, a treasure in the heavens that faileth not.* And chap. xvi. 9.

Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; that when ye shall fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations. And 1 Tim. vi. 17. 18. 19. Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not high-minded, &c. that they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate; laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life. The word θεμέλιος, which our translation renders *foundation*, according to the common use of it, seems in this place to have a more peculiar notion, and to signify the security that is given by a pledge, or by an instrument or obligation of contract for the performance of covenants. For besides that the phrase of *laying up in store*, or *treasuring up a foundation*, seems to be a very odd jumbling of metaphors; this very word θεμέλιος almost necessarily requires this notion, as it is used by the same apostle, in his second epistle to Timothy, chap. ii. 19. where it is said, *The foundation of God stands sure, having this seal, &c. a seal being very improper to strengthen a foundation, but very proper to confirm a covenant.* And then surely it ought to be rendered, *The covenant of God remains firm, having this seal.* And so likewise in the forementioned text, the sense will be much more easy and current if we render it thus: *Treasuring up (or providing) for themselves a good security (or pledge) against the time to come.* I add *pledge*, because that anciently was the common way of security for things lent. Besides that the apostle seems plainly to allude to that passage, Tobit iv. 8. 9. *If thou hast abundance, give alms accordingly, &c. For thou layest up a good treasure for thyself against the day of necessity.* Θίμα γὰρ ἀγαθὴν θησαυρίζεις: *For thou treasure up for thyself a good pledge.* To which this of the apostle exactly answers: ἀποθησαυρίζοντας ἑαυτοῖς θεμέλιον καλόν; *treasuring up or providing for themselves a good pledge or security, &c.* The sense however is plain, that the charity of alms is one of the best ways of securing our future happiness.

And yet further to encourage us to abound in works of charity, the scripture tells us, that proportionably to the degrees of our charity, shall be the degrees of our reward. Upon this consideration the apostle exhorts the
Corinthians

Corinthians to be liberal in their charity, 2 Cor. ix. 6. *He that soweth sparingly, shall reap sparingly; but he that soweth bountifully, shall reap bountifully.* So that whatever we lay out in this kind, is to the greatest advantage, and upon the best security; two considerations which use to be very prevalent with rich men to lay out their money.

We certainly do it to the greatest advantage; because God will consider the very smallest thing that any of us do in this kind. He that shall give so much as a *cup of cold water to a disciple, in the name of a disciple, shall not lose his reward.* These last words, *shall not lose his reward*, are a *μεῖωσις*, and signify much more than they seem to speak, viz. that he shall have a very great reward, infinitely beyond the value of what he hath done.

And we do it likewise upon the best security. So Solomon assures us, Prov. xix. 17. *He that hath pity upon the poor, lendeth to the Lord; and that which he hath given, will he pay him again.* And we may be confident of our security where God is surety; nay, he tells us, that in this case he looks upon himself as principal; and that whatever we do in ways of mercy and charity to the poor, he takes it as done to himself. So our Lord hath told us, Matth. xxv. 40. And we shall hear the same from him again out of his own mouth, when he shall appear in his majesty to judge the world: *Then the King shall answer, and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.*

And, on the other side, the scripture no where passeth a more severe doom upon any sort of persons, than upon those who have no bowels of compassion towards their brethren in distress. That is a fearful sentence indeed, which the Apostle pronounceth upon such persons, James ii. 13. *He shall have judgement without mercy, that hath shewed no mercy.* And this our Saviour represents to us in a most solemn manner, in that lively description which he makes of the judgement of the great day, Matth. xxv. 31. &c. *When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory. And before him shall be gathered all nations; and he shall separate them one from another,*

another, as a shepherd divideth the sheep from the goats; and he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was an hungred and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me. Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was an hungred, and ye gave me no meat, &c. And these shall go away into everlasting punishment; but the righteous into life eternal. And if this be, as most certainly it is, a true and proper representation of the process of that day; then the great matter of inquiry will be, what works of charity and mercy have been done or neglected by us? and accordingly a sentence of eternal happiness or misery will be passed upon us. I was hungry, did ye feed me, or did ye not? I was naked, did ye clothe me, or did ye not? I was sick, and in prison, did ye visit me, or did ye not? Not but that all the good and evil of our lives, in what kind soever, shall then be brought to account; but that our Saviour did chuse to instance particularly, and only, in things of this nature, should methinks make a mighty impression upon us, and be a powerful consideration to oblige us to have a very peculiar regard to works of mercy and charity, and to make sure to abound in this grace; that when we shall appear before the judge of the world, we may find that mercy from him which we have shewed to others, and which we shall all undoubtedly stand in need of in that day.

And, among all our acts of charity, those which are done upon least probability and foresight of their meeting with any recompence in this world, either by way of real requital, or of fame and reputation, as they are of all other most acceptable to God, so they will certainly have the most ample reward in another world. So our Lord hath assured us; and accordingly adviseth us, Luke xiv. 12. 13. 14. *When thou makest a feast, invite not the rich, because they will recompense thee again; but call*

call the poor, the maimed, the lame, and the blind; for they cannot recompense thee; but thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just. If we be religious for worldly ends, and serve God and do good to men only in contemplation of some temporal advantage, we take up with present payment, and cut ourselves short of our future reward. Of such saith our Lord, *Verily, I say unto you, they have their reward; "they are their own security, and have taken care to satisfy themselves, "and therefore are to expect nothing from God."* But let us who call ourselves Christians, do something for God, for which we have no hopes to be recompensed in this world; that we may shew, that we trust God, and take his word, and dare venture upon the security of the next world, and that *recompence* which shall be made *at the resurrection of the just.*

And how great and glorious that shall be, our Saviour tells us immediately before my text: *They that shall be accounted worthy to obtain that world, and the resurrection from the dead, they can die no more; but they are equal to the angels, and are the children of God, being the children of the resurrection.* If then we be heirs of such glorious hopes, and believe that he who is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, will also be our God; let us live as it becomes the candidates of heaven, and the *children of the resurrection*; and such as verily believe another life after this, and hope one day to *sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of God.*

And now that I have represented to you what encouragement there is to well-doing, and particularly to works of charity, from the consideration of the blessed reward we shall certainly meet with at the resurrection of the just; I shall crave your patience a little longer, whilst I propose to you one of the fairest examples of this kind, which either this, or perhaps any other age could easily present us withal; I mean our deceased brother, to whom we are now paying our last solemn respects, the Reverend Mr Thomas Gouge, the worthy son of a reverend and learned divine of this city, Dr William Gouge; who was minister of this parish of Blackfriars six and forty years. He died in 1653, and still lives in the memory of many here present.

I must confess, that I am no friend to funeral panegyrics, where there is nothing of extraordinary worth and merit in the party commended to give occasion and foundation for them. In such cases, as praises are not due to the dead, so they may be of ill consequence to the living; not only by bringing those of our profession that make a practice of it, under the suspicion of officious and mercenary flattery, but likewise by encouraging men to hope that they also may be well spoken of, and even fainted when they are dead, though they should have done little or no good in their life. But yet, on the other hand, to commend those excellent persons, the virtues of whose lives have been bright and exemplary, is not only a piece of justice due to the dead, but an act of great charity to the living; setting a pattern of well-doing before our eyes, very apt and powerful to incite and encourage us *to go and do likewise*.

Upon both these considerations, first to do right to the memory of so good a man, and then in hopes that the example may prove fruitful, and have a considerable effect upon others to beget the like goodness and charity in them; I shall endeavour, in as narrow a compass as may be, to give you the just character of this truly pious and charitable man; and, by setting his life in a true light, to recommend, with all the advantage I can, so excellent a pattern to your imitation.

He was born at Bow, near Stratford, in the county of Middlesex, the 19th day of September 1605. He was bred at Eaton school; and from thence chosen to King's college in Cambridge, being about twenty years of age, in the year 1626. After he had finished the course of his studies, and taken his degrees, he left the university and his fellowship, being presented to the living of Collden near Croyden, in Surrey; where he continued about two or three years; and from thence was removed to St Sepulchres, in London, in the year 1638: and the year after, thinking fit to change his condition, matched into a very worthy and ancient family, marrying one of the daughters of Sir Robert Darcy.

Being thus settled in this large and populous parish, he did, with great solicitude and pains, discharge all the parts of a vigilant and faithful Minister, for about the
space

space of twenty-four years. For, besides his constant and weekly labour of preaching, he was very diligent and charitable, in visiting the sick, and ministering not only spiritual counsel and comfort to them, but likewise liberal relief to the wants and necessities of those that were poor, and destitute of means to help themselves in that condition. He did also every morning throughout the year catechise in the church, especially the poorer sort, who were generally most ignorant; and, to encourage them to come thither to be instructed by him, he did once a-week distribute money among them, not upon a certain day, but changing it on purpose as he thought good, that he might thereby oblige them to be constantly present. These were chiefly the more aged poor, who, being past labour, had leisure enough to attend upon this exercise. As for the other sort of poor, who were able to work for their living, he set them at work upon his own charge; buying flax and hemp for them to spin; and what they spun he took off their hands, paying them for their work; and then got it wrought into cloth, and sold it as he could, chiefly among his friends, himself bearing the whole loss. And this was a very wise and well chosen way of charity; and, in the good effect of it, a much greater charity, than if he had given these very persons freely, and for nothing, so much as they earned by their work; because, by this means, he took many off from begging, and thereby rescued them at once from two of the most dangerous temptations of this world, idleness and poverty; and, by degrees, reclaimed them to a virtuous and industrious course of life, which enabled them afterwards to live without being beholden to the charity of others.

And this course so happily devised and begun by Mr Gouge in his own parish, was, I think, that which gave the first hint to that worthy and useful citizen Mr Thomas Firmin, of a much larger design, which hath been prosecuted by him for some years with that vigour and good success in this city, that many hundreds of poor children, and others who lived idle before, unprofitable both to themselves and the public, are continually maintained at work, and taught to earn their own livelihood much in the same way: he being, by the generous assistance

ance and charity of many worthy and well disposed persons of all ranks, enabled to bear the unavoidable loss and charge of so vast an undertaking; and, by his own forward inclination to charity, and his unwearied diligence and activity, extraordinarily fitted to sustain and go through the incredible pains of it.

But, to return to our deceas'd friend; concerning whom I must content myself to pass over many things worthy to be remembered of him, and to speak only of those virtues of his which were more eminent and remarkable.

Of his piety towards God, which is the necessary foundation of all other graces and virtues, I shall only say this, that it was great and exemplary, but yet very still and quiet, without stir and noise, and much more in substance and reality, than in shew and ostentation; and did not consist in censuring and finding fault with others, but in the due care and government of his own life and actions, and *exercising himself continually to have a conscience void of offence toward God and toward men*; in which he was such a proficient, that even after a long acquaintance and familiar conversation with him, it was not easy to observe any thing that might deserve blame.

He particularly excelled in the more peculiar virtues of conversation, in modesty, humility, meekness, cheerfulness, and in kindness and charity towards all men.

So great was his modesty, that it never appeared, either by word or action, that he put any value upon himself. This I have often observed in him, that the charities which were procured chiefly by his application and industry, when he had occasion to give an account of them, he would rather impute to any one who had but the least hand and part in the obtaining of them, than assume any thing of it to himself. Another instance of his modesty was, that, when he had quitted his living of St Sepulchres, upon some dissatisfaction about the terms of conformity, he willingly forbore preaching, saying, there was no need of him here in London, where there were so many worthy Ministers; and that he thought he might do as much or more good in another way, which could give no offence. Only, in the latter years of his life, being better satisfied in some things he had doubted of

of before, he had licence from some of the bishops to preach in Wales in his progress; which he was the more willing to do, because in some places he saw great need of it; and he thought he might do it with greater advantage among the poor people, who were the more likely to regard his instructions, being recommended by his great charity, so well known to them, and of which they had so long had the experience and benefit. But where there was no such need, he was very well contented, to hear others persuade them to goodness, and to practise it himself.

He was *clothed with humility*, and had, in a most eminent degree, that *ornament of a meek and quiet spirit*, which St Peter says, is, in the sight of God, of so great price: so that there was not the least appearance, either of pride or passion, in any of his words or actions. He was not only free from anger and bitterness, but from all affected gravity and moroseness. His conversation was affable and pleasant. He had a wonderful serenity of mind, and evenness of temper, visible in his very countenance. He was hardly ever merry, but never melancholy or sad: and, for any thing I could discern, after a long and intimate acquaintance with him, he was upon all occasions and accidents perpetually the same; always chearful, and always kind; of a disposition ready to embrace and oblige all men; allowing others to differ from him, even in opinions that were very dear to him; and provided men did but *fear God and work righteousness*, he loved them heartily, how distant soever from him in judgement about things less necessary: in all which he is very worthy to be a pattern for men of all persuasions whatsoever.

But that virtue which of all others shone brightest in him, and was his most proper and peculiar character, was his chearful and unwearied diligence in acts of pious charity. In this he left far behind him all that ever I knew, and, as I said before, had a singular sagacity and prudence in devising the most effectual ways of doing good; and in managing and disposing his charity to the best purposes, and to the greatest extent; always, if it were possible, making it to serve some end of piety and religion; as the instructions of poor children in the principles

ciples of religion, and furnishing grown persons that were ignorant, with the Bible, and other books; strictly obliging those to whom he gave them to a diligent reading of them, and, when he had opportunity, exacting of them an account how they had profited by them.

In his occasional alms to the poor, in which he was very free and bountiful, the relief he gave them was always mingled with good counsel, and as great a tenderness and compassion for their souls as bodies: which very often attained the good effect it was likely to have; the one making way for the other with so much advantage, and men being very apt to follow the good advice of those who gave them in hand so sensible a pledge and testimony of their good will to them.

This kind of charity must needs be very expensive to him: but he had a plentiful estate settled upon him, and left him by his father; and he laid it out as liberally in the most prudent and effectual ways of charity he could think of, and upon such persons as, all circumstances considered, he judged to be the fittest and most proper objects of it.

For about nine or ten years last past, he did, as is well known to many here present, almost wholly apply his charity to Wales, because there he judged was most occasion for it: and because this was a very great work, he did not only lay out upon it whatever he could spare out of his own estate, but employed his whole time and pains to excite and engage the charity of others for his assistance in it.

And in this he had two excellent designs; one to have poor children brought up to read and write, and to be carefully instructed in the principles of religion; the other, to furnish persons of grown age, the poor especially, with the necessary helps and means of knowledge, as the Bible, and other books of piety and devotion, in their own language: to which end he procured *The church-catechism*, *The practice of piety*, and that best of books, *The whole duty of man*, besides several other pious and useful treatises, some of them to be translated into the Welch tongue, and great numbers of all of them to be printed, and sent down to the chief towns in Wales, to

to be sold at easy rates to those that were able to buy them, and to be freely given to those that were not.

And in both these designs, through the blessing of God upon his unwearied endeavours, he found very great success. For, by the large and bountiful contributions which, chiefly by his industry and prudent application, were obtained from charitable persons of all ranks and conditions; from the nobility and gentry of Wales, and the neighbouring counties, and several of that quality in and about London; from divers of the Right Reverend Bishops, and of the clergy; and from that perpetual fountain of charity, the city of London, led on and encouraged by the most bountiful example of the Right Honourable the Lord Mayor, and the court of Aldermen; to all which he constantly added two thirds of his own estate, which, as I have been credibly informed, was two hundred pounds a year: I say, by all these together, there were every year eight hundred, sometimes a thousand poor children educated, as I said before. And, by this example, several of the most considerable towns in Wales were excited to bring up, at their own charge, the like number of poor children, in the like manner, and under his inspection and care.

He likewise gave very great numbers of the books above mentioned, both in the Welch and English tongues, to the poorer sort, so many as were unable to buy them, and willing to read them. But, which was the greatest work of all, and amounted indeed to a mighty charge, he procured a new and very fair impression of the Bible, and liturgy of the church of England, in the Welch tongue (the former impression being spent, and hardly twenty of them to be had in all London) to the number of eight thousand; one thousand whereof were freely given to the poor, and the rest sent to the principal cities and towns in Wales, to be sold to the rich at very reasonable and low rates, *viz.* at four shillings a-piece well bound and clasped: which was much cheaper than any English Bible was ever sold, that was of so fair a print and paper. A work of that charge, that it was not likely to have been done any other way; and for which this age, and perhaps the next, will have great cause to thank God on his behalf.

In these good works he employed all his time, and care, and pains: and his whole heart was in them; so that he was very little affected with any thing else, and seldom either minded or knew any thing of the strange occurrences of this troublesome and busy age, such as I think are hardly to be paralleled in any other; or, if he did mind them, he scarce ever spoke any thing about them. For this was the business he laid to heart; and knowing it to be so much and so certainly the will of his heavenly father, it was his meat and drink to be doing of it. And the good success he had in it, was a continual feast to him, and gave him a perpetual serenity both of mind and countenance. His great love and zeal for this work, made all the pains and difficulties of it seem nothing to him. He would rise early, and sit up late, and continued the same diligence and industry to the last, though he was in the threescore and seventeenth year of his age. And that he might manage the distribution of this great charity with his own hands, and see the good effect of it with his own eyes, he always once, but usually twice a-year, at his own charge, travelled over a great part of Wales; none of the best countries to travel in: but, for the love of God and men, he endured all that, together with the extremity of heat and cold, which in their several seasons are both very great there, not only with patience, but with pleasure. So that, all things considered, there have not, since the primitive times of Christianity, been many among the sons of men to whom that glorious character of the Son of God might be better applied, that *he went about doing good*. And Wales may as worthily boast of this truly Apostolical man, as of their famous St David; who was also very probably a good man, as those times of ignorance and superstition went. But his goodness is so disguised by their fabulous legends and stories, which give us the account of him, that it is not easy to discover it. Indeed ridiculous miracles in abundance are reported of him; as, that, upon occasion of a great number of people resorting from all parts to hear him preach, for the greater advantage of his being heard, a mountain all on a sudden rose up miraculously under his feet, and his voice was extended to that degree, that he might be distinctly

tingly heard for two or three miles round about. Such fantastical miracles as these, make up a great part of his history. And, admitting all these to be true, which a wise man would be loth to do, our departed friend had that which is much greater and more excellent than all these, a fervent charity to God and men; which is more than to *speak* (as they would have us believe St David did) *with the tongue of men and angels*; more than to raise or remove mountains.

And now methinks it is pity so good a design, so happily prosecuted, should fall and die with this good man. And it is now under deliberation, if possible, still to continue and carry it on; and a very worthy and charitable person pitched upon for that purpose, who is willing to undertake that part which he that is gone performed so well. But this will depend upon the continuance of the former charities, and the concurrence of those worthy and well disposed persons in Wales to contribute their part as formerly; which I persuade myself they will chearfully do. I will add but one thing more concerning our deceased brother, that though he meddled not at all in our present heats and differences as a party, having much better things to mind; yet, as a looker on, he did very sadly lament them; and, for several of the last years of his life, he continued in the communion of our church, and, as he himself told me, he thought himself obliged in conscience so to do.

He died in the seventy-seventh year of his age, October 29. 1681. It pleased God, that his death was very sudden; and so sudden, that in all probability he himself hardly perceived it when it happened; for he died in his sleep. So that we may say of him, as it is said of David, *After he had served his generation according to the will of God, he fell asleep.*

I confess, that a sudden death is generally undesirable, and therefore with reason we pray against it; because so very few are sufficiently prepared for it. But to him, the constant employment of whose life was the best preparation for death that was possible, no death could be sudden: nay, it was rather a favour and blessing to him, because by how much the more sudden, so much the more easy; as if God had designed to begin the reward

of the great pains of his life in an easy death. And indeed it was rather a translation, than a death; and, saving that his body was left behind, what was said of Enoch, may not unfitly be applied to this pious and good man, with respect to the suddenness of his change: *He walked with God, and was not; for God took him.*

And God grant that we who survive may all of us sincerely endeavour to tread in the steps of his exemplary piety and charity; of his labour of love, his unwearied diligence and patient continuance in doing good, that we may meet with that encouraging commendation, which he hath already received from the mouth of our Lord, *Well done good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.*

Now, the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus Christ, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you always that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever. Amen.

S E R M O N XXIV.

Preached at the funeral of the Reverend Benjamin Whichcot, D. D. May 24. 1683.

2 COR. V. 6.

Wherefore we are always confident, knowing that whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord.

THese words contain one of the chief grounds of encouragement which the Christian religion gives us against the fear of death. For our clearer understanding of them, it will be requisite to consider the context, looking back as far as the beginning of the chapter, where the Apostle pursues the argument of the foregoing

foregoing chapter, which was, to comfort and encourage Christians under their afflictions and sufferings, from this consideration, that these did but prepare the way for a greater and more glorious reward: *Our light affliction which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.* And suppose the worst, that these sufferings should extend to death, there is comfort for us likewise in this case: ver. 1. of this chapter, *For we know, that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, &c. If our earthly house of this tabernacle:* he calls our body an *earthly house*; and that we may not look upon it as a certain abode, and fixed habitation, he doth, by way of correction of himself, add, that it is but a tabernacle, or tent, which must shortly be taken down; and when it is, *we shall have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.* This is a description of our heavenly habitation, in opposition to our earthly house or tabernacle. It is a *building of God*; not like those houses or tabernacles which men build, and which are liable to decay and dissolution, to be taken down, or to fall down of themselves; for such are those houses of clay which we dwell in, *whose foundations are in the dust*; but an habitation prepared by God himself, *a house not made with hands*; that which is the immediate work of God, being in scripture opposed to that which is made with hands, and effected by human concurrence, and by natural means: and being the immediate work of God, as it is excellent, so it is lasting and durable, which no earthly thing is; *eternal in the heavens*, that is, eternal and heavenly.

For in this we groan earnestly; that is, while we are in this body, we groan by reason of the pressures and afflictions of it. *Desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven: if so be that being clothed we shall not be found naked.* *Desiring to be clothed upon*: that is, we could wish not to put off these bodies, not to be stripped of them by death; but to be of the number of those who, at the coming of our Lord, without the putting off these bodies, shall be changed, and clothed upon with their house which is from heaven, and, without dying, be invested with those spiritual and glo-

rious and heavenly bodies which men shall have at the resurrection.

This, I doubt not, is the Apostle's meaning in these words; in which he speaks according to a common opinion among the disciples, grounded, as St John tells us, upon a mistake of our Saviour's words concerning him: *If I will that he tarry till I come.* Upon which St John tells us, that *there went a saying among the brethren, that that disciple should not die; that is, that he should live till Christ's coming to judgement, and then be changed; and consequently that Christ would come to judgement before the end of that age.* Suitable to this common opinion among Christians, the Apostle here says, *In this we groan earnestly, desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven; if so be that being clothed, we shall not be found naked.* It hath puzzled interpreters what to make of this passage: and well it might; for, whatever be meant by being clothed, how can they that are clothed be found naked? But I think it is very clear, that our translators have not attained the true sense of this passage, *Εἴ γε καὶ ἐνδυσάμενοι, ὃ γυμνοὶ ἐπεσσομένης,* which is most naturally rendered thus, *If so be we shall be found clothed, and not naked; that is, if the coming of Christ shall find us in the body, and not divested of it; if at Christ's coming to judgement, we shall be found alive, and not dead.* And then the sense of the whole is very clear and current: we are *desirous to be clothed upon with our house from heaven*, (that is, with our spiritual and immortal bodies), if so be it shall happen, that at the coming of Christ we shall be found alive in these bodies, and not stripped of them before by death. And then it follows, *For we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened*, that is, with the afflictions and pressures of this life); *not that we would be unclothed*, (that is, not that we desire by death to be divested of these bodies), *but clothed upon*, (that is, if God see it good, we had rather be found alive, and changed, and, without putting off these bodies, have immortality as it were superinduced), *that so mortality might be swallowed up of life.* The plain sense is, that he rather desires, if it may be, to be of the number of those who shall be found alive at the coming of Christ, and

and have this mortal and corruptible body while they are clothed with it, changed into a spiritual and incorruptible body, without the pain and terror of dying: of which immediate translation into heaven, without the painful divorce of soul and body by death, Enoch and Elias were examples in the Old Testament.

It follows, ver. 5. *Now he that hath wrought us for the self-same thing, is God*; that is, it is he who hath fitted and prepared us for this glorious change; *who also hath given us the earnest of the Spirit*. The Spirit is frequently in scripture called the *Witness*, and *Seal*, and *Earnest* of our future happiness, and blessed resurrection or change of these vile and earthly bodies into spiritual and heavenly bodies. For as the resurrection of Christ from the dead, by the power of the Holy Ghost, is the great proof and evidence of immortality; so the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwelling in us, is the pledge and earnest of our resurrection to an immortal life.

From all which the Apostle concludes in the words of the text, *Therefore we are always confident*; that is, we are always of good courage against the fear of death, *knowing that whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord*, ἐνδημοῦντες ἐν τῷ σώματι, which may better be rendered, *whilst we converse or sojourn in the body, than whilst we are at home*; because the design of the Apostle is, to shew, that the body is not our house but our tabernacle; and that whilst we are in the body, we are not at home, but pilgrims and strangers. And this notion the Heathens had of our present life and condition in this world. *Ex vita discedo* (saith Tully) *tantumquam ex hospitio, non tantquam ex domo; commorandi enim natura diversorium nobis, non habitandi locum dedit*:
 “We go out of this life, as it were from an inn, and
 “not from our home; nature having designed it to us
 “as a place to sojourn, but not to dwell in.”

We are absent from the Lord; that is, we are detained from the blessed sight and enjoyment of God, and kept out of the possession of that happiness which makes heaven.

So that the Apostle makes an immediate opposition between our continuance in the body, and our blissful enjoyment

enjoyment of God ; and lays it down for a certain truth, that, whilst we remain in the body, we are detained from our happiness ; and that, so soon as ever we leave the body, we shall be admitted into it : *Knowing that whilst we converse in the body, we are absent from the Lord :* and, ver. 8. *We are willing rather to be absent from the body, and present with the Lord ;* intimating, that so soon as we quit these bodies, we shall be admitted to the blessed sight and enjoyment of God.

My design from this text is, to draw some useful collaries or conclusions from this assertion of the Apostle, That whilst we are in these bodies, we are detained from our happiness ; and that so soon as ever we depart out of them, we shall be admitted to the possession and enjoyment of it. And they are these.

1. This assertion shews us the vanity and falsehood of that opinion, or rather dream, concerning the sleep of the soul from the time of death till the general resurrection. This is chiefly grounded upon that frequent metaphor in scripture, by which death is resembled to sleep, and those that are dead are said to be fallen asleep. But this metaphor is no where in scripture, that I know of, applied to the soul ; but to the body resting in the grave, in order to its being awakened and raised up at the resurrection. And thus it is frequently used with express reference to the body : Dan. xii. 2. *Many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake.* Matth. xxvii. 52. *And the graves were opened, and many bodies of saints which slept, arose.* Acts xiii. 36. *David after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell on sleep, and was laid unto his fathers, and saw corruption :* which surely can no otherwise be understood than of his body. 1 Cor. xv. 20. *Now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first fruits of them that slept ;* that is, the resurrection of his body is the earnest and assurance that ours also shall be raised ; and, ver. 51. *We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed ;* where the Apostle certainly speaks both of the death and change of these corruptible bodies. 1 Thess. iv. 14. *If we believe that Jesus died, and rose again, even so them also that sleep in Jesus, will God bring with him ;* that is, the bodies of those that died in the Lord shall be raised, and accompany

pany him at his coming. So that it is the body which is said in scripture to sleep, and not the soul: for that is utterly inconsistent with the Apostle's assertion here in the text, *That while we are in the body, we are absent from the Lord*; and that so soon as we depart out of the body, we shall *be present with the Lord*. For, surely, *to be with the Lord* must signify a state of happiness; which sleep is not, but only of inactivity; besides that the Apostle's argument would be very flat; and it would be but a cold encouragement against the fear of death, that so soon as we are dead, we shall fall asleep, and become insensible. But the Apostle useth it as an argument why we should be willing to die as soon as God pleaseth: and the sooner the better; because so soon as we quit these bodies, we shall be *present with the Lord*; that is, admitted to the blissful sight and enjoyment of him; and while we abide in the body, we are detained from our happiness. But if our souls shall sleep as well as our bodies till the general resurrection, it is all one whether we continue in the body or not, as to any happiness we shall enjoy in the mean time; which is directly contrary to the main scope of the Apostle's argument.

2. This assertion of the Apostle's doth perfectly conclude against the feigned purgatory of the church of Rome; which supposeth the far greater number of true and faithful Christians, of those who die in the Lord, and have obtained eternal redemption by him from hell, not to pass immediately into a state of happiness, but to be detained in the suburbs of hell, in extremity of torment, (equal to that of hell for degree, though not for duration), till their souls be purged, and the guilt of temporal punishments, which they are liable to, be some way or other paid off and discharged. They suppose indeed some very few holy persons, especially those who suffer martyrdom, to be so perfect at their departure out of the body, as to pass immediately into heaven, because they need no purgation: but most Christians they suppose to die so imperfect, that they stand in need of being purged; and, according to the degree of their imperfection, are to be detained a shorter or a longer time in purgatory.

But

But now, besides that there is no text in scripture from whence any such state can probably be concluded, as is acknowledged by many learned men of the church of Rome; (and even that text which they have most insisted upon, *They shall be saved, yet so as by fire*, is given up by them as insufficient to conclude the thing. Estius is very glad to get off it, by saying there is nothing in it against purgatory. Why? no body pretends that; but we might reasonably expect that there should be something for it in a text which hath been so often produced and urged by them for the proof of it): I say, besides that there is nothing in scripture for purgatory, there are a great many things against it, and utterly inconsistent with it. In the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, which was designed to represent to us the different states of good and bad men in another world, there is not the least intimation of purgatory, but that good men pass immediately into a state of happiness, and bad men into a place of torment. And St John, Rev. xiv. 13. pronounceth all that die in the Lord happy, because *they rest from their labours*: which they cannot be said to do who are in a state of great anguish and torment, as those are supposed to be who are in purgatory.

But, above all, this reasoning of St Paul is utterly inconsistent with any imagination of such a state: for he encourageth all Christians in general against the fear of death, from the consideration of that happy state they should immediately pass into, by being admitted into the presence of God; which surely is not purgatory: *We are of good courage*, (says he), *and willing rather to be absent from the body*. And great reason we should be so, if so soon as we leave the body, we are *present with the Lord*. But no man, sure, would be glad to leave the body to go into a place of exquisite and extreme torment; which they tell us is the case of most Christians when they die. And what can be more unreasonable, than to make the Apostle to use an argument to comfort all Christians against the fear of death, which concerns but very few in comparison? So that if the Apostle's reasoning be good, that while we are in this life, we are detained from our happiness, and so soon as we depart this life, we pass immediately

immediately into it ; and therefore death is desirable to all good men : I say, if this reasoning be good, it is very clear, that St Paul knew nothing of the doctrine now taught in the church of Rome concerning purgatory ; because that is utterly inconsistent with what he expressly asserts in this chapter, and quite takes away the force of his whole argument.

3. To encourage us against the fear of death. And this is the conclusion which the Apostle makes from this consideration : *Therefore* (says he) *we are of good courage, knowing that whilst we converse in the body, we are absent from the Lord.* There is in us a natural love of life, and a natural horror and dread of death ; so that our spirits are apt to shrink at the thoughts of the approach of it. But this fear may very much be mitigated, and even over-ruled by reason, and the considerations of religion. For death is not so dreadful in itself, as with regard to the consequences of it ; and those will be as we are, comfortable and happy to the good, but dismal and miserable to the wicked. So that the only true antidote against the fear of death, is the hopes of a better life ; and the only firm ground of these hopes, is the mercy of God in Jesus Christ, upon our due preparation for another world, by repentance and a holy life. For the sting of death is sin ; and, when that is taken away, the terror and bitterness of death is past : and then death is so far from being dreadful, that, in reason, it is extremely desirable ; because it lets us into a better state, such as only deserves the name of life. *Hi vivunt qui ex corporum vinculis tanquam è carcere evolverunt ; vestra verò quæ dicitur vita, mors est :* “ They truly live (could a Hea-
“ then say) who have made their escape out of this prison
“ of the body : but that which men commonly call life,
“ is rather death than life.” To live indeed, is to be well, and to be happy ; and that we shall never be till we are got beyond the grave.

4. This consideration should comfort us under the loss and death of friends, which certainly is one of the greatest grievances and troubles of human life. For if they be fit for God, and go to him when they die, they are infinitely happier than it was possible for them to have been in this world ; and the trouble of their absence from

us is fully balanced by their being *present with the Lord*. For why should we lament the end of that life which we are assured is the beginning of immortality? One reason of our trouble for the loss of friends, is because we loved them; but it is no sign of our love to them, to grudge and repine at their happiness. But we hoped to have enjoyed them longer. Be it so; yet why should we be troubled that they are happy sooner than we expected? But they are parted from us; and the thought of this is grievous. But yet the consideration of their being parted for a while, is not near so sad, as the hopes of a happy meeting again, never to be parted any more, is comfortable and joyful. So that the greater our love to them was, the less should be our grief for them, when we consider that they are happy, and that they are safe; past all storms, all the troubles and temptations of this life, and out of the reach of all harm and danger for ever. But though the reason of our duty in this case be very plain, yet the practice of it is very difficult; and when all is said, natural affection will have its course; and, even after our judgement is satisfied, it will require some time to still and quiet our passions.

5. This consideration should wean us from the love of life; and make us not only contented, but willing and glad to leave this world, whenever it shall please God to call us out of it. This inference the Apostle makes, ver. 8. *We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and present with the Lord*. Though there were no state of immortality after this life, yet methinks we should not desire to live always in this world. *Habet natura*, (says Tully), *ut aliarum rerum, sic vivendi modum*: “As nature hath set bounds and measures to other things, so likewise to life;” of which men should know when they have enough, and not covet so much of it till they be tired and cloyed with it. If there were no other inconvenience in long life, this is a great one, that, in a long course of time, we unavoidably see a great many things which we would not; our own misfortunes and the calamities of others, public confusions and distractions, the loss of friends and relations, or, which is worse, their misery, or which is worst

worst of all, their miscarriage : especially, a very infirm and tedious old age is very undesirable ; for who would desire to live long uneasy to himself, and troublesome to others ? It is time for us to be willing to die, when we cannot live with the good-will even of our friends ; when those who ought to love us best, think much that we live so long, and can hardly forbear to give us broad signs that they are weary of our company. In such a case, a man would almost be contented to die out of civility ; and not chuse to make any long stay, where he sees that his company is not acceptable. If we think we can be welcome to a better place, and to a more delightful society, why should we desire to thrust ourselves any longer upon an ill-natured world ; upon those who have much ado to refrain from telling us, that our room is better than our company ?

Some indeed have a very happy and vigorous old age, and the taper of life burns clear in them to the last. Their understandings are good, their memories and senses tolerable, their humour pleasant, and their conversation acceptable, and their relations kind and respectful to them. But this is a rare felicity, and which seldom happens but to those who have lived wisely and virtuously, and, by a religious and regular course of life, have preserved some of their best spirits to the last ; and have not, by vice and extravagance, drawn off life to the dregs, and left nothing to be enjoyed but infirmities and ill humours, guilt and repentance : but, on the contrary, have prudently laid up some considerable comforts and supports for themselves against this gloomy day ; having stored their minds with wisdom and knowledge, and taken care to secure to themselves the comfortable reflexions of an useful and well spent life, and the favour and loving-kindness of God, which is better than life itself. But, generally, the extremities of old age are very peevish and querulous, and a declining and falling back to the weak and helpless condition of infancy and childhood : and yet less care is commonly taken to please aged persons, and less kindness shewed to them, (unless it be in expectation of receiving greater from them) than to children ; because these are cherished in hopes, the others in despair, of their growing better.

So that, if God see it good, it is not desirable to live to try nature, and the kindness and good-will of our relations, to the utmost.

Nay, there is reason enough why we should be well contented to die in any age of our life. If we are young, we have tasted the best of it; if in our middle age, we have not only enjoyed all that is desirable of life, but almost all that is tolerable; if we are old, we are come to the dregs of it, and do but see the same things over and over again, and continually with less pleasure.

Especially if we consider the happiness from which we are all this while detained. This life is but our infancy and childhood in comparison of the manly pleasures and employments of the other state. And why should we desire to be always children; and to linger here below, to play the fools yet a little longer? In this sense that high expression of the poet is true:

— *Dii celant homines, ut vivere durent,
Quam sit dulce mori: —*

“The gods conceal from men the sweetness of dying,
“to make them patient and contented to live.”

This life is wholly in order to the other. Do but make sure to live well, and there is no need of living long. To the purpose of preparation for another world, the best life is the longest. Some live a great pace, and, by continual diligence and industry in serving God and doing good, do really dispatch more of the business of life in a few years, than others do in a whole age; who go such a sauntering pace towards heaven, as if they were in no haste to get thither. But, if we were always prepared, we should rejoice at the prospect of our end, as those who have been long tossed at sea are overjoyed at the sight of land.

I have now done with my text; but have another subject to speak of, that excellent man in whose place I now stand, whom we all knew, and whom all that knew him well did highly esteem and reverence. He was born in Shropshire, of a worthy and ancient family, the 11th of March 1609; was the sixth son of his father; and, being bred up to learning, and very capable of it, was sent to the university of Cambridge, and planted there in E-

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manuel college ; where he was chosen fellow ; and was an excellent tutor and instructor of youth ; and bred up as many persons of quality, and others, who afterwards proved useful and eminent ; as many perhaps as any tutor of that time.

About the age of four or five and thirty he was made Provost of King's college ; where he was a most vigilant and prudent governor, a great encourager of learning and good order ; and, by his careful and wise management of the state of the college, brought it into a very flourishing condition, and left it so.

It cannot be denied, nor am I much concerned to dissemble it, that here he possessed another man's place, who, by the iniquity of the times, was wrongfully ejected. I mean Dr Collins, the famous and learned Divinity-Professor of that university. During whose life, (and he lived many years after), by the free consent of the college, there were two shares out of the common dividend allotted to the Provost : one whereof was constantly paid to Dr Collins, as if he had been still Provost. To this Dr Whichcot did not only give his consent, (without which the thing could not have been done), but was very forward for the doing of it, though hereby he did not only considerably lessen his own profit, but likewise incur no small censure and hazard, as the times then were. And, lest this had not been kindness enough to that worthy person whose place he possessed, in his last-will he left to his son, Sir John Collins, a legacy of one hundred pounds.

And, as he was not wanting either in respect or real kindness to the rightful owner, so neither did he stoop to do any thing unworthy to obtain that place ; for he never took the covenant : and not only so, but, by the particular friendship and interest which he had in some of the chief of the visitors, he prevailed to have the greatest part of the fellows of that college exempted from that imposition ; and preserved them in their places by that means. And to the fellows that were ejected by the visitors, he likewise freely consented that their full dividend for that year should be paid them, even after they were ejected. Among these was the reverend and ingenious Dr Charles Mason ; upon whom, after he was

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ejected.

ejected, the college did confer a good living which then fell in their gift, with the consent of the Provost, who, knowing him to be a worthy man, was contented to run the hazard of the displeasure of those times.

So that I hope none will be hard upon him, that he was contented upon such terms to be in a capacity to do good in bad times.

For, besides his care of the college, he had a very great and good influence upon the university in general. Every Lord's day in the afternoon, for almost twenty years together, he preached in Trinity church, where he had a great number, not only of the young scholars, but of those of greater standing and best repute for learning in the university, his constant and attentive auditors: and, in those wild and unsettled times, contributed more to the forming of the students of that university to a sober sense of religion, than any man in that age.

After he left Cambridge, he came to London, and was chosen minister of Blackfriars; where he continued till the dreadful fire: and then retired himself to a donative he had at Milton near Cambridge; where he preached constantly, and relieved the poor, and had their children taught to read at his own charge, and made up differences among the neighbours. Here he staid, till, by the promotion of the Reverend Dr Wilkins, his predecessor in this place, to the bishoprick of Chester, he was by his interest and recommendation presented to this church. But, during the building of it, upon the invitation of the court of Aldermen, in the mayoralty of Sir William Turner, he preached before that Honourable auditory at Guildhall chapel every Sunday in the afternoon, with great acceptance and approbation, for about the space of seven years.

When his church was built, he bestowed his pains here twice a-week, where he had the general love and respect of his parish; and a very considerable and judicious auditory, though not very numerous, by reason of the weakness of his voice in his declining age.

It pleased God to bless him, as with a plentiful estate, so with a charitable mind: which yet was not so well known to many, because in the disposal of his charity he very much affected secrecy. He frequently bestowed his
alms,

alms, as I am informed by those who best knew, on poor house-keepers, disabled by age or sickness to support themselves, thinking those to be the most proper objects of it. He was rather frugal of expence upon himself, that so he might have wherewithal to relieve the necessities of others.

And he was not only charitable in his life, but in a very bountiful manner at his death: bequeathing in pious and charitable legacies to the value of a thousand pounds: To the library of the university of Cambridge, fifty pounds; and of King's college, one hundred pounds; and of Emanuel college, twenty pounds: to which college he had been a considerable benefactor before; having founded there several scholarships to the value of a thousand pounds, out of a charity with the disposal whereof he was intrusted, and which not without great difficulty and pains he at last recovered.

To the poor of the several places where his estate lay, and where he had been Minister, he gave above one hundred pounds.

Among those who had been his servants, or were so at his death, he disposed in annuities and legacies in money, to the value of above three hundred pounds.

To other charitable uses, and among the poorer of his relations, above three hundred pounds.

To every one of his tenants he left a legacy according to the proportion of the estate they held, by way of remembrance of him: and to one of them that was gone much behind, he remitted in his will seventy pounds. And, as became his great goodness, he was ever a remarkably kind landlord, forgiving his tenants, and always making abatements to them for hard years, or any other accidental losses that happened to them.

I must not omit the wise provision he made in his will to prevent law-suits among the legatees, by appointing two or three persons of greatest prudence and authority among his relations, final arbitrators of all differences that should arise.

Having given this account of his last-will, I come now to the sad part of all; sad I mean to us, but happiest to him. A little before Easter last, he went down to Cambridge; where, upon taking a great cold, he fell

into a distemper, which in a few days put a period to his life. He died in the house of his ancient and most learned friend Dr Cudworth, master of Christ's college. During his sickness he had a constant calmness and serenity of mind; and, under all his bodily weakness, possessed his soul in great patience. After the prayers for the visitation of the sick (which he said were excellent prayers) had been used, he was put in mind of receiving the sacrament; to which he answered, That he most readily embraced the proposal: and after he had received it, said to Dr Cudworth, I heartily thank you for this most Christian office: I thank you for putting me in mind of receiving this sacrament; adding this pious ejaculation, "The Lord fulfil all his declarations and promises, and "pardon all my weaknesses and imperfections." He disclaimed all merit in himself, and declared, that whatever he was, he was through the grace and goodness of God in Jesus Christ. He expressed likewise great dislike of the principles of separation, and said, "He was the "more desirous to receive the sacrament, that he might "declare his full communion with the church of Christ "all the world over." He disclaimed Popery, and (as things of near affinity with it, or rather parts of it) all superstition and usurpation upon the consciences of men.

He thanked God, that he had no pain in his body, nor disquiet in his mind.

Towards his last, he seemed rather unwilling to be detained any longer in this state; not for any pains he felt in himself, but for the trouble he gave his friends; saying to one of them who had with great care attended him all along in his sickness: "My dear friend, thou "hast taken a great deal of pains to uphold a crazy bo- "dy, but it will not do: I pray thee give me no more "cordials; for why shouldst thou keep me any longer "out of that happy state to which I am going? I thank "God I hope in his mercy, that it shall be well with "me."

And herein God was pleased particularly to answer those devout and well-weighed petitions of his, which he frequently used in his prayer before sermon, which I shall set down in his own words; and I doubt not but those

those that were his constant hearers do well remember them : “ And superadd this, O Lord, to all the graces
“ and favours which thou hast shewn us all along in life,
“ not to remove us hence but with all advantage for
“ eternity ; when we shall be in a due preparation of
“ mind, in a holy constitution of soul, in a perfect renunciation of the guise of this mad and sinful world ;
“ when we shall be entirely resigned up to thee, when
“ we shall have clear acts of faith in God by Jesus
“ Christ, high and reverential thoughts of thee in our
“ minds, enlarged and inflamed affections towards thee,
“ &c. And whensoever we shall come to leave this world,
“ which will be when thou shalt appoint, for the issues
“ of life and death are in thy hands, afford us such a
“ mighty power and presence of thy good spirit, that
“ we may have solid consolation in believing, and avoid all consternation of mind, all doubtfulness and
“ uncertainty concerning our everlasting condition, and
“ at length depart in the faith of God’s elect,” &c.
Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright ; for the end of that man is peace.

Thus you have a short history of the life and death of this eminent person, whose just character cannot be given in few words, and time will not allow me to use many. To be able to describe him aright, it were necessary one should be like him : for which reason I must content myself with a very imperfect draught of him.

I shall not insist upon his exemplary piety and devotion towards God, of which his whole life was one continued testimony : nor will I praise his profound learning, for which he was justly had in so great reputation. The moral improvements of his mind, a God-like temper and disposition, (as he was wont to call it), he chiefly valued and aspired after ; that universal charity and goodness which he continually preached and practised.

His conversation was exceeding kind and affable, grave and winning, prudent and profitable. He was slow to declare his judgement, and modest in delivering it. Never passionate, never peremptory : so far from imposing upon others, that he was rather apt to yield. And though he had a most profound and well-poised judgement ; yet was he of all men I ever knew the most patient

patient to hear others differ from him, and the most easy to be convinced when good reason was offered ; and, which is seldom seen, more apt to be favourable to another man's reason than his own.

Studious and inquisitive men commonly at such an age, at forty or fifty at the utmost, have fixed and settled their judgements in most points, and as it were made their last understanding ; supposing they have thought, or read, or heard what can be said on all sides of things ; and after that, they grow positive, and impatient of contradiction, thinking it a disparagement to them to alter their judgement. But our deceased friend was so wise, as to be willing to learn to the last ; knowing that no man can grow wiser without some change of his mind, without gaining some knowledge which he had not, or correcting some error which he had before.

He had attained so perfect a mastery of his passions, that for the latter and greatest part of his life, he was hardly ever seen to be transported with anger : and as he was extremely careful not to provoke any man, so not to be provoked by any ; using to say, “ If I provoke a man, he is the worse for my company ; and “ if I suffer myself to be provoked by him, I shall be “ the worse for his.”

He very seldom reproved any person in company, otherwise than by silence, or some sign of uneasiness, or some very soft and gentle word ; which yet, from the respect men generally bore to him, did often prove effectual. For he understood human nature very well, and how to apply himself to it in the most easy and effectual ways.

He was a great encourager and kind director of young divines ; and one of the most candid hearers of sermons, I think, that ever was : so that, though all men did mightily reverence his judgement, yet no man had reason to fear his censure. He never spoke well of himself, nor ill of others ; making good that saying of Panfa in Tully, *Neminem alterius, qui suæ consideret virtuti, invidere* ; that “ no man is apt to envy the worth and virtues of another, that hath any of his own to trust to.”

In a word, he had all those virtues, and in a high degree, which an excellent temper, great consideration,
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long care and watchfulness over himself, together with the assistance of God's grace (which he continually implored, and mightily relied upon) are apt to produce. Particularly, he excelled in the virtues of conversation, humanity, and gentleness, and humility: a prudent, and peaceable, and reconciling temper. And God knows, we could very ill at this time have spared such a man; and have lost from among us as it were so much balm for the healing of the nation, which is now so miserably rent and torn by those wounds which we madly give ourselves. But since God hath thought good to deprive us of him, let his virtues live in our memory, and his example in our lives. Let us endeavour to be what he was, and we shall one day be what he now is, of blessed memory on earth, and happy for ever in heaven.

And now methinks the consideration of the argument I have been upon, and of that great example that is before us, should raise our minds above this world, and fix them upon the glory and happiness of the other. Let us then begin heaven here, in the frame and temper of our minds; in our heavenly affections and conversation; in a due preparation for, and in earnest desires and breathings after that blessed state which we firmly believe and assuredly hope to be one day possessed of; when we shall be removed out of this sink of sin and sorrows, into the regions of bliss and immortality; where we shall meet all those worthy and excellent persons who are gone before us, and whose conversation was so delightful to us in this world, and will be much more so to us in the other; when the spirits of just men shall be made perfect, and shall be quit of all those infirmities which did attend and lessen them in this mortal state; when we shall meet again with our dear brother, and all those good men whom we knew in this world, and with the saints and excellent persons of all ages, to enjoy their blessed friendship and society for ever, in the presence of the blessed God, where is *fulness of joy, at whose right hand are pleasures for evermore.*

In a firm persuasion of this happy state, let us, every one of us, say with David, and with the same ardency of affection that he did, *As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. My soul thirsteth*

thirsteth for God, for the living God: O when shall I come and appear before God? that so the life which we now live in this world, may be a patient continuance in well-doing, in a joyful expectation of the blessed hope, and the glorious appearance of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ. To whom, with the Father, and the Holy Ghost, be all honour and glory, now and for ever.

Now, the God of peace, who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus Christ, the great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make us perfect in every good work to do his will; working in us always that which is well pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever. Amen.

S E R M O N XXV.

A persuasive to frequent communion.

I C O R. xi. 26. 27. 28.

For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come.

Wherefore, whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord unworthily, is guilty of the body and blood of the Lord.

But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup.

MY design in this argument is, from the consideration of the nature of this sacrament of the Lord's supper, and of the perpetual use of it to the end of the world, to awaken men to a sense of their duty, and the great obligation that lies upon them to the more frequent receiving of it. And there is the greater need to make men sensible of their duty in this particular, because, in this last age, by the unwary discourse of some concerning the nature of this sacrament, and the danger

danger of receiving it unworthily, such doubts and fears have been raised in the minds of men, as utterly to deter many, and in a great measure to discourage almost the generality of Christians from the use of it; to the great prejudice and danger of mens souls, and the visible abatement of piety, by the gross neglect of so excellent a means of our growth and improvement in it; and to the mighty scandal of our religion, by the general disuse and contempt of so plain and solemn an institution of our blessed Lord and Saviour.

Therefore I shall take occasion, as briefly and clearly as I can, to treat of these four points.

1. Of the perpetuity of this institution. This the Apostle signifies, when he saith, that *by eating this bread, and drinking this cup, we do shew the Lord's death till he come.*

2. Of the obligation that lies upon all Christians to a frequent observance of this institution. This is signified in that expression of the Apostle, *As often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup*: which expression, considered and compared together with the practice of the primitive church, does imply an obligation upon Christians to the frequent receiving of this sacrament.

3. I shall endeavour to satisfy the objections and scruples which have been raised in the minds of men, and particularly of many devout and sincere Christians, to their great discouragement from their receiving this sacrament, at least so frequently as they ought: which objections are chiefly grounded upon what the Apostle says: *Wherefore, whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord unworthily, is guilty of the body and blood of the Lord; and doth eat and drink damnation to himself.*

4. What preparation of ourselves is necessary, in order to our worthy receiving of this sacrament: which will give me occasion to explain the Apostle's meaning in those words, *But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup.*

I. For the perpetuity of this institution, implied in those words, *For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew forth the Lord's death till he come*: or the words may be read imperatively, and by way of precept, *shew ye forth the Lord's death till he come.* In
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the three verses immediately before, the Apostle particularly declares the institution of this sacrament, with the manner and circumstances of it, as he had received it, not only by the hands of the Apostles, but as the words seem rather to intimate, by immediate revelation from our Lord himself. ver. 23. *For I have received of the Lord, that which I also delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus, in the same night that he was betrayed, took bread: and when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat; this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me. After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do, as often as ye shall drink it, in remembrance of me.* So that the institution is in these words, *This do in remembrance of me.* In which words our Lord commands his disciples, after his death, to repeat these occasions of *taking*, and *breaking*, and *eating the bread*, and of *drinking of the cup*, by way of solemn commemoration of him. Now, whether this was to be done by them once only, or oftener; and whether by the disciples only during their lives, or by all Christians afterwards in all successive ages of the church, is not so certain merely from the force of these words, *Do this in remembrance of me.* But what the Apostle adds, puts the matter out of all doubt, that the institution of this sacrament was intended, not only for the Apostles, and for that age, but for all Christians, and for all ages of the Christian church: *For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come;* that is, until the time of his second coming, which will be at the end of the world. So that this sacrament was designed to be a standing commemoration of the death and passion of our Lord, till he should come to judgement; and consequently the obligation that lies upon Christians to the observation of it, is perpetual, and shall never cease to the end of the world.

So that it is a vain conceit, and mere dream of the enthusiasts, concerning the *seculum Spiritus Sancti*, “the age and dispensation of the Holy Ghost;” when, as they suppose, all human teaching shall cease, and all external ordinances and institutions in religion shall vanish, and there shall be no farther use of them. Whereas it is very plain,

plain, from the New Testament, that prayer, and outward teaching, and the use of the two sacraments, were intended to continue among Christians in all ages. As for prayer, besides our natural obligation to this duty, if there were no revealed religion, we are, by our Saviour, particularly exhorted to *watch and pray* with regard to the day of judgement, and in consideration of the uncertainty of the time when it shall be: and therefore this will always be a duty incumbent upon Christians till the day of judgement; because it is prescribed as one of the best ways of preparation for it. That outward teaching likewise, and baptism, were intended to be perpetual, is no less plain; because Christ has expressly promised to be with the teachers of his church in the use of these ordinances to the end of the world: Matt. xxviii. 19. 20. *Go and disciple all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: and lo I am with you always to the end of the world*; not only to the end of that particular age, but to the end of the gospel-age, and the consummation of all ages; as the phrase clearly imports. And it is as plain from this text, that the sacrament of the Lord's supper was intended for a perpetual institution in the Christian church, till the second coming of Christ, viz. his coming to judgement; because St Paul tells us, that by these sacramental signs, the death of Christ is to be represented and commemorated till he comes: *Do this in remembrance of me: for as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come.*

And if this be the end and use of this sacrament, to be a solemn remembrance of the death and sufferings of our Lord during his absence from us, that is, till his coming to judgement, then this sacrament will never be out of date till the second coming of our Lord. The consideration whereof should mightily strengthen and encourage our faith in the hope of eternal life, so often as we partake of this sacrament; since our Lord hath left it to us as a memorial of himself, till he came to translate his church into heaven, and as a sure pledge that he will come again at the end of the world, and invest us in that glory which he is now gone before to prepare for us. So that as often as we approach the table of the Lord, we should

comfort ourselves with the thoughts of that blessed time, when we shall eat and drink with him in his kingdom, and shall be admitted to the great feast of the Lamb, and to eternal communion with God the judge of all, and with our blessed and glorious Redeemer, and the holy angels, and the spirits of just men made perfect.

And the same consideration should likewise make us afraid to receive this sacrament unworthily, without due preparation for it, and without worthy effects of it upon our hearts and lives; because of that dreadful sentence of condemnation which, at the second coming of our Lord, shall be passed upon those who, by the profanation of this solemn institution, trample under foot the Son of God, and contemn the blood of the covenant; that covenant of grace and mercy which God hath ratified with mankind by the blood of his Son. The Apostle tells us, that *he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, is guilty of the body and blood of the Lord, and eateth and drinketh damnation to himself.* This indeed is spoken of temporal judgement, as I shall shew in the latter part of this discourse; but the Apostle likewise supposeth, that if these temporal judgements had not their effect to bring men to repentance, but they still persisted in the profanation of this holy sacrament, they should at last *be condemned with the world.* For as he that partaketh worthily of this sacrament, confirms his interest in the promises of the gospel, and his title to eternal life; so he that receives this sacrament unworthily, that is, without due reverence, and without fruits meet for it; nay, on the contrary, continues to live in sin whilst he commemorates the death of Christ, *who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity,* this man aggravates and seals his own damnation; because he is guilty of the body and blood of Christ, not only by the contempt of it, but by renewing in some sort the cause of his sufferings, and as it were *crucifying to himself afresh the Lord of glory, and putting him to an open shame.* And, when the great judge of the world shall appear, and pass final sentences upon men, such obstinate and impenitent wretches as could not be wrought upon by the remembrance of the dearest love of their dying Lord, nor be engaged to
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leave their sins by all the ties and obligations of this holy sacrament, shall have their portion with Pilate and Judas, with the chief priests and soldiers, who were the betrayers and murderers of the Lord of life and glory; and shall be dealt withal as those who are in some sort *guilty of the body and blood of the Lord*. Which severe threatening ought not to discourage men from the sacrament, but to deter all those from their sins who think of engaging themselves to God by so solemn and holy a covenant. It is by no means a sufficient reason to make them fly from the sacrament, but certainly one of the most powerful arguments in the world to make men forsake their sins; as I shall shew more fully under the third head of this discourse.

II. The obligation that lies upon all Christians to the frequent observance and practice of this institution. For though it be not necessarily implied in these words, *As oft as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup*; yet, if we compare these words of the Apostle with the usage and practice of Christians at that time, which was to communicate in this holy sacrament, so often as they solemnly meet together to worship God, they plainly suppose and recommend to us the frequent use of this sacrament, or rather imply an obligation upon Christians to embrace all opportunities of receiving it. For the sense and meaning of any law or institution is best understood by the general practice which follows immediately upon it.

And to convince men of their obligation hereunto, and to engage them to a suitable practice, I shall now endeavour with all the plainness and force of persuasion I can: and so much the more, because the neglect of it among Christians is grown so general, and a great many persons, from a superstitious awe and reverence of this sacrament, are by degrees fallen into a profane neglect and contempt of it.

I shall briefly mention a threefold obligation lying upon all Christians to frequent communion in this holy sacrament; each of them sufficient of itself, but all of them together of the greatest force imaginable, to engage us hereunto.

I. We are obliged in point of indispensable duty, and in obedience to a plain precept and most solemn institu-

tion of our blessed Saviour, that great *lawgiver*, who is *able to save and to destroy*, as St James calls him: he hath bid us *do this*. And St Paul, who declares nothing in this matter but what he tells us he *received from the Lord*, admonisheth us to do it *often*. Now, for any man that professeth himself a Christian, to live in the open and continued contempt or neglect of a plain law and institution of Christ, is utterly inconsistent with such a profession. To such our Lord may say, as he did to the Jews, *Why call ye me Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?* How far the ignorance of this institution, or the mistakes which men have been led into about it, may extenuate this neglect, is another consideration. But, after we know our Lord's will in this particular, and have the law plainly laid before us, there is no cloak for our sin: for nothing can excuse the wilful neglect of a plain institution, from a downright contempt of our Saviour's authority.

2. We are likewise obliged hereunto in point of interest. The benefits which we expect to be derived and assured to us by this sacrament, are all the blessings of the new covenant; the forgiveness of our sins; the grace and assistance of God's holy Spirit to enable us to perform the conditions of this covenant required on our part; and the comforts of God's holy Spirit to encourage us in well-doing, and to support us under sufferings; and the glorious reward of eternal life. So that in neglecting this sacrament, we neglect our own interest and happiness; we forsake our own mercies, and judge ourselves unworthy of all the blessings of the gospel; and deprive ourselves of one of the best means and advantages of confirming and conveying these blessings to us. So that, if we had not a due sense of our duty, the consideration of our own interest should oblige us not to neglect so excellent and so effectual a means of promoting our own comfort and happiness.

3. We are likewise particularly obliged in point of gratitude to the careful observance of this institution. This was the particular thing our Lord gave in charge when he was going to lay down his life for us: *Do this in remembrance of me*. Men use religiously to observe the charge of a dying friend, and, unless it be very difficult

cult and unreasonable, to do what he desires. But this is the charge of our best friend, nay of the greatest friend and benefactor of all mankind, when he was preparing himself to die in our stead, and to offer up himself a sacrifice for us; to undergo the most grievous pains and sufferings for our sakes, and to yield up himself to the worst of temporal deaths, that he might deliver us from the bitter pains of eternal death. And can we deny him any thing he asks of us, who was going to do all this for us? Can we deny him this; so little grievous and burdensome in itself, so infinitely beneficial to us? Had such a friend, and in such circumstances, bid us do some great thing, would we not have done it? how much more when he hath only said, *Do this in remembrance of me*; when he hath only commended to us one of the most natural and delightful actions, as a fit representation and memorial of his wonderful love to us, and of his cruel sufferings for our sakes; when he hath only enjoined us, in a thankful commemoration of his goodness, to meet at his table, and to remember what he hath done for us; to look upon him whom we have pierced, and to resolve to grieve and wound him no more? Can we, without the most horrible ingratitude, neglect this dying charge of our sovereign and our Saviour, the great friend and lover of souls? A command so reasonable, so easy, so full of blessings and benefits to the faithful observers of it!

One would think it were no difficult matter to convince men of their duty in this particular, and of the necessity of observing so plain an institution of our Lord; that it were no hard thing to persuade men to their interest, and to be willing to partake of those great and manifold blessings which all Christians believe to be promised and made good to the frequent and worthy receivers of this sacrament. Where then lies the difficulty? what should be the cause of all this backwardness which we see in men, to so plain, so necessary, and so beneficial a duty? The truth is, men have been greatly discouraged from this sacrament, by the unwary pressing and inculcating of two great truths; the danger of the unworthy receiving of this holy sacrament, and the ne-

cessity of a due preparation for it. Which brings me to the

III. Third particular I proposed; which was, to endeavour to satisfy the objections and scruples which have been raised in the minds of men, and particularly of many devout and sincere Christians, to their great discouragement from the receiving of this sacrament, at least so frequently as they ought. And these objections, I told you, are chiefly grounded upon what the Apostle says at the 27th verse: *Wherefore, whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord unworthily, is guilty of the body and blood of the Lord*: and again, ver. 29. *He that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself*. Upon the mistake and misapplication of these texts, have been grounded two objections, of great force to discourage men from this sacrament; which I shall endeavour, with all the tenderness and clearness I can, to remove. 1. That the danger of unworthy receiving being so very great, it seems the safest way not to receive it at all. 2. That so much preparation and worthiness being required in order to our worthy receiving, the more timorous sort of devout Christians can never think themselves duly enough qualified for so sacred an action.

1. That the danger of unworthy receiving being so very great, it seems the safest way wholly to refrain from this sacrament, and not to receive it at all. But this objection is evidently of no force, if there be (as most certainly there is) as great or greater danger on the other hand, viz. in the neglect of this duty; and so though the danger of unworthy receiving be avoided by not receiving, yet the danger of neglecting and contemning a plain institution of Christ is not thereby avoided. Surely they in the parable that refused to come to the marriage-feast of the King's Son, and made light of that gracious invitation, were at least as faulty as he who came without a wedding-garment. And we find in the conclusion of the parable, that as he was severely punished for his disrespect, so they were destroyed for their disobedience. Nay, of the two, it is the greater sign of contempt, wholly to neglect the sacrament, than to partake of it without some due qualification. The greatest
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indisposition that can be for this holy sacrament, is one's being a bad man ; and he may be as bad, and is more likely to continue so, who wilfully neglects this sacrament, than he that comes to it with any degree of reverence and preparation, though much less than he ought. And surely it is very hard for men to come to so solemn an ordinance, without some kind of religious awe upon their spirits, and without some good thoughts and resolutions, at least for the present. If a man that lives in any known wickedness of life do, before he receive the sacrament, set himself seriously to be humbled for his sins, and to repent of them, and to beg God's grace and assistance against them ; and after the receiving of it, does continue for some time in these good resolutions, though after a while he may possibly relapse into the same sins again ; this is some kind of restraint to a wicked life : and these good moods, and fits of repentance and reformation, are much better than a constant and uninterrupted course of sin. Even his righteousness, which is but *as the morning cloud and the early dew, which so soon passeth away*, is better than none.

And indeed scarce any man can think of coming to the sacrament, but he will by this consideration be excited to some good purposes, and put upon some sort of endeavour to amend and reform his life ; and though he be very much under the bondage and power of evil habits, if he do with any competent degree of sincerity (and it is his own fault if he do not) make use of this excellent means and instrument for the mortifying and subduing of his lusts, and for the obtaining of God's grace and assistance, it may please God, by the use of these means, so to abate the force and power of his lusts, and to imprint such considerations upon his mind in the receiving of this holy sacrament, and preparing himself for it, that he may at last break off his wicked course, and become a good man.

But, on the other hand, as to those who neglect this sacrament, there is hardly any thing left to restrain them from the greatest enormities of life, and to give a check to them in their evil course ; nothing but the penalty of human laws, which men may avoid, and yet be wicked enough. Heretofore men used to be restrained
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from great and scandalous vices by shame, and fear of disgrace, and would abstain from many sins out of regard to their honour and reputation among men: but men have hardened their faces in this degenerate age; and those gentle restraints of modesty which governed and kept them in order heretofore, signify nothing now-a-days. Blushing is out of fashion, and shame is ceased from among the children of men.

But the sacrament did always use to lay some kind of restraint upon the worst of men; and if it did not wholly reform them, it would at least have some good effect upon them for a time. If it did not make men good, yet it would make them resolve to be so, and leave some good thoughts and impressions upon their minds.

So that I doubt not but it hath been a thing of very bad consequence, to discourage men so much from the sacrament, as the way hath been of late years; and that many men, who were under some kind of check before, since they have been driven away from the sacrament, have quite let loose the reins, and prostituted themselves to all manner of impiety and vice. And among the many ill effects of our past confusions, this is none of the least, that, in many congregations of this kingdom, Christians were generally disused and deterred from the sacrament, upon a pretence that they were unfit for it; and, being so, they must necessarily incur the danger of unworthy receiving: and therefore they had better wholly to abstain from it. By which it came to pass, that in very many places this great and solemn institution of the Christian religion was almost quite forgotten, as if it had been no part of it; and the remembrance of Christ's death even lost among Christians: so that many congregations in England might justly have taken up the complaint of the woman at our Saviour's sepulchre, *They have taken away our Lord, and we know not where they have laid him.*

But surely men did not well consider what they did, nor what the consequences of it would be, when they did so earnestly dissuade men from the sacrament. It is true indeed, the danger of unworthy receiving is great; but the proper inference and conclusion from hence is not, that men should upon this consideration be deterred

red from the sacrament, but that they should be affrighted from their sins, and from that wicked course of life which is an habitual indisposition and unworthiness. St Paul indeed, as I observed before, truly represents and very much aggravates the danger of the unworthy receiving of this sacrament ; but he did not deter the Corinthians from it, because they had sometimes come to it without due reverence, but exhorts them to amend what had been amiss, and to come better prepared and disposed for the future. And therefore, after that terrible declaration in the text, *Whosoever shall eat this bread and drink this cup of the Lord unworthily, is guilty of the body and blood of the Lord*, he does not add, Therefore let Christians take heed of coming to the sacrament ; but, Let them come prepared, and with due reverence, not as to a common meal, but to a solemn participation of the body and blood of Christ : *But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup.*

For if this be a good reason to abstain from the sacrament, for fear of performing so sacred an action in an undue manner, it were best for a bad man to lay aside all religion, and to give over the exercise of all the duties of piety, of prayer, of reading and hearing the word of God ; because there is a proportionable danger in the unworthy and unprofitable use of any of these : *The prayer of the wicked* (that is, of one that resolves to continue so) *is an abomination to the Lord.* And our Saviour gives us the same caution concerning hearing the word of God : *Take heed how you hear.* And St Paul tells us, that to those who are not reformed by the doctrine of the gospel, it is *the favour of death* ; that is, deadly and damnable to such persons.

But now will any man from hence argue, that it is best for a wicked man not to pray, nor to hear or read the word of God, lest by so doing he should endanger and aggravate his condemnation ? And yet there is as much reason from this consideration, to persuade men to give over praying, and attending to God's word, as to lay aside the use of the sacrament. And it is every whit as true, that he that prays unworthily, and hears the word of God unworthily, that is, without fruit and benefit, is
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guilty of a great contempt of God and of our blessed Saviour ; and, by his indevout prayers, and unfruitful hearing of God's word, does further and aggravate his own damnation. I say, this is every whit as true, as he that eats and drinks the sacrament unworthily, is guilty of a high contempt of Christ, and *eats and drinks his own judgement*. So that the danger of the unworthy performing this so sacred an action, is no otherwise a reason to any man to abstain from the sacrament, than it is an argument to him to cast off all religion. He that unworthily useth or performs any part of religion, is in an evil and dangerous condition : but he that casts off all religion, plungeth himself into a most desperate state ; and does certainly damn himself, to avoid the danger of damnation ; because he that casts off all religion, throws off all the means whereby he should be reclaimed, and brought into a better state. I cannot more fitly illustrate this matter than by this plain similitude. He that eats and drinks intemperately, endangers his health and his life ; but he that, to avoid this danger, will not eat at all, I need not tell you what will certainly become of him in a very short space.

There are some conscientious persons, who abstain from the sacrament upon an apprehension that the sins which they shall commit afterwards are unpardonable. But this is a great mistake ; our Saviour having so plainly declared, that all manner of sin shall be forgiven men, except the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost : such as was that of the Pharisees, who, as our Saviour tells us, blasphemed the Holy Ghost, in ascribing those great miracles which they saw him work, and which he really wrought by the Spirit of God, to the power of the devil. Indeed, to sin deliberately, after so solemn an engagement to the contrary, is a great aggravation of sin, but not such as to make it unpardonable. But the neglect of the sacrament is not the way to prevent these sins ; but, on the contrary, the constant receiving of it with the best preparation we can, is one of the most effectual means to prevent sin for the future, and to obtain the assistance of God's grace to that end : and if we fall into sin afterwards, we may be renewed by repentance : *For we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous,*
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who is the propitiation for our sins; and as such, is, in a very lively and affecting manner, exhibited to us in this blessed sacrament of his body broken and his blood shed for the remission of our sins. Can we think, that the primitive Christians, who so frequently received this holy sacrament, did never after the receiving of it fall into any deliberate sin? Undoubtedly many of them did: but far be it from us to think, that such sins were unpardonable; and that so many good men should, because of their careful and conscientious observance of our Lord's institution, unavoidably fall into condemnation.

To draw to a conclusion of this matter: Such groundless fears and jealousies as these, may be a sign of a good meaning, but they are certainly a sign of an injudicious mind. For if we stand upon these scruples, no man perhaps was ever so worthily prepared to draw near to God in any duty of religion, but there was still some defect or other in the disposition of his mind, and the degree of his preparation. But if we prepare ourselves as well as we can, this is all God expects. And for our fears of falling into sin afterwards, there is this plain answer to be given to it, That the danger of falling into sin is not prevented by neglecting the sacrament, but increased; because a powerful and probable means of preserving men from sin is neglected. And why should not every sincere Christian, by the receiving of this sacrament, and renewing his covenant with God, rather hope to be confirmed in goodness, and to receive farther assistances of God's grace and Holy Spirit to strengthen him against sin, and to enable him to subdue it, than trouble himself with fears, which are either without ground, or if they are not, are no sufficient reason to keep any man from the sacrament? We cannot surely entertain so unworthy a thought of God and our blessed Saviour, as to imagine that he did institute the sacrament, not for the furtherance of our salvation, but as a snare, and an occasion of our ruin and damnation. This were to pervert the gracious design of God, and to turn the cup of salvation into a cup of deadly poison to the souls of men.

All then that can reasonably be inferred from the danger of unworthy receiving, is, that upon this consideration

tion men should be quickened to come to the sacrament with a due preparation of mind, and so much the more to fortify their resolutions of living suitably to that holy covenant which they solemnly renew every time they receive this holy sacrament. This consideration ought to convince us of the absolute necessity of a good life, but not to deter us from the use of any means which may contribute to make us good. Therefore, as a learned divine says very well, this sacrament can be neglected by none but those that do not understand it; but those who are unwilling to be tied to their duty, and are afraid of being engaged to use their best diligence to keep the commandments of Christ: and such persons have no reason to fear being in a worse condition, since they are already in so bad a state. And thus much may suffice for answer to the first objection concerning the great danger of unworthy receiving this holy sacrament. I proceed to the

2. Second objection, which was this, That so much preparation and worthiness being required to our worthy receiving, the more timorous sort of Christians can never think themselves duly enough qualified for so sacred an action.

For a full answer to this objection, I shall endeavour briefly to clear these three things. 1. That every degree of imperfection in our preparation for this sacrament, is not a sufficient reason for men to refrain from it. 2. That a total want of a due preparation, not only in the degree, but in the main and substance of it, though it render us unfit at present to receive this sacrament, yet it does by no means excuse our neglect of it. 3. That the proper inference and conclusion from the total want of a due preparation, is not to cast off all thoughts of receiving the sacrament, but immediately to set upon the work of preparation, that so we may be fit to receive it. And if I can clearly make out these three things, I hope this objection is fully answered.

1st, That every degree of imperfection in our preparation for this sacrament, is not a sufficient reason for men to abstain from it: for then no man should ever receive it. For who is every way worthy, and in all degrees and respects duly qualified to approach the presence of
God

God in any of the duties of his worship and service ; Who can *wash his hands in innocency*, that so he may be perfectly fit to approach God's altar ? *There is not a man on earth, that lives, and sins not.* The graces of the best men are imperfect ; and every imperfection in grace and goodness, is an imperfection in the disposition and preparation of our minds for this holy sacrament : but if we do heartily repent of our sins, and sincerely resolve to obey and perform the terms of the gospel, and of that covenant which we entered into by baptism, and are going solemnly to renew and confirm by our receiving of this sacrament, we are at least in some degree, and in the main, qualified to partake of this holy sacrament ; and the way for us to be more fit, is to receive this sacrament frequently, that by this spiritual food of God's appointing, by *this living bread which comes down from heaven*, our souls may be nourished in goodness, and new strength and virtue may be continually derived to us for the purifying of our hearts, and enabling us to run the ways of God's commandments with more constancy and delight. For the way to grow in grace, and to be *strengthened with all might in the inner man*, and to *abound in all the fruits of righteousness which by Christ Jesus are to the praise and glory of God*, is with care and conscience to use those means which God hath appointed for this end : and if we will neglect the use of these means, it is for no purpose for us to pray to God for his grace and assistance. We may tire ourselves with our devotion, and fill heaven with vain complaints ; and yet, by all this importunity, obtain nothing at God's hand : like lazy beggars, that are always complaining, and always asking ; but will not work, will do nothing to help themselves, and better their condition ; and therefore are never like to move the pity and compassion of others. If we expect God's grace and assistance, we must work out our salvation in the careful use of all those means which God hath appointed to that end. That excellent degree of goodness which men would have to fit them for the sacrament, is not to be had but by the use of it. And therefore it is a preposterous thing for men to insist upon having the end before they will use the means that may further them in the obtaining of it.

2dly, The total want of a due preparation, not only in the degree, but in the main and substance of it, though it render us unfit at present to receive this sacrament, yet does it by no means excuse our neglect of it. One fault may draw on another, but can never excuse it. It is our great fault, that we are wholly unprepared; and no man can claim any benefit by his fault, or plead it in excuse or extenuation of this neglect. A total want of preparation, and an absolute unworthiness, is impenitency in an evil course; a resolution to continue a bad man; not to quit his lusts, and to break off that wicked course he hath lived in: but is this any excuse for the neglect of our duty, that we will not fit ourselves for the doing of it with benefit and advantage to ourselves? A father commands his son to ask his blessing every day, and is ready to give it him; but so long as he is undutiful to him in his other actions, and lives in an open disobedience, he forbids him to come in his sight. He excuseth himself from asking his father's blessing, because he is undutiful in other things, and resolves to continue so. This is just the case of neglecting the duty God requires, and the blessings he offers to us in the sacrament, because we have made ourselves incapable of so performing the one as to receive the other, and are resolved to continue so. We will not do our duty in other things, and then plead that we are unfit and unworthy to do it in this particular of the sacrament.

3dly, The proper inference and conclusion from a total want of due preparation for the sacrament, is not to cast off all thoughts of receiving it, but immediately to set about the work of preparation, that so we may be fit to receive it. For if this be true, that they who are absolutely unprepared, ought not to receive the sacrament, nor can do it with any benefit; nay, by doing it in such a manner, render their condition much worse; this is a most forcible argument to repentance, and amendment of life. There is nothing reasonable in this case, but immediately to resolve upon a better course, that so we may be meet partakers of those holy mysteries, and may no longer provoke God's wrath against us, by the wilful neglect of so great and necessary a duty of the Christian religion. And we do wilfully neglect it, so long as we do

do wilfully refuse to fit and qualify ourselves for the due and worthy performance of it. Let us view the thing in a like case : a pardon is graciously offered to a rebel ; he declines to accept of it, and modestly excuseth himself, because he is not worthy of it. And why is he not worthy ? Because he resolves to be a rebel, and then his pardon will do him no good, but be an aggravation of his crime. Very true : and it will be no less an aggravation that he refuseth it for such a reason, and under a pretence of modesty does the most imprudent thing in the world. This is just the case ; and in this case there is but one thing reasonable to be done, and that is, for a man to make himself capable of the benefit as soon as he can, and thankfully to accept of it : but to excuse himself from accepting of the benefit offered, because he is not worthy of it, nor fit for it, nor ever intends to be so, is as if a man should desire to be excused from being happy, because he is resolved to play the fool, and to be miserable. So that, whether our want of preparation be total, or only to some degree, it is every way unreasonable : if it be in the degree only, it ought not to hinder us from receiving the sacrament ; if it be total, it ought to put us immediately upon removing the impediment, by making such preparation as is necessary to the due and worthy receiving of it. And this brings me to the

IV. Fourth and last thing I proposed, *viz.* What preparation of ourselves is necessary, in order to the worthy receiving of this sacrament. Which I told you would give me occasion to explain the Apostle's meaning in the last part of the text, *But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup.* I think it very clear, from the occasion and circumstances of the Apostle's discourse concerning the sacrament, that he does not intend the examination of our state, whether we be Christians or not, and sincerely resolve to continue so ; and consequently that he does not here speak of our habitual preparation by the resolution of a good life. This he takes for granted, that they were Christians, and resolved to continue and persevere in their Christian profession. But he speaks of their actual fitness and worthiness at that time when they came to receive the Lord's supper. And for the clearing of this matter, we must con-

sider what it was that gave occasion to this discourse. At the 20th verse of this chapter, he sharply reproves their irreverent and unsuitable carriage at the Lord's supper. They came to it very disorderly, *one before another*. It was the custom of Christians to meet at their feast of charity, in which they did communicate with great sobriety and temperance; and, when that was ended, they celebrated the sacrament of the Lord's supper. Now, among the Corinthians this order was broken. The rich met, and excluded the poor from this common feast. And after an irregular feast (one before another eating his own supper as he came) they went to the sacrament in great disorder; one was hungry, having eaten nothing at all; others were drunk, having eaten intemperately; and the poor were despised and neglected. This the Apostle condemns as a great profanation of that solemn institution of the sacrament; at the participation whereof they behaved themselves with as little reverence as if they had been met at a common supper or feast. And this he calls *not discerning the Lord's body*, making no difference in their behaviour between the sacrament and a common meal: which irreverent and contemptuous carriage of theirs, he calls *eating and drinking unworthily*; for which he pronounceth them *guilty of the body and blood of the Lord*, which were represented and commemorated in their *eating of that bread, and drinking of that cup*. By which irreverent and contemptuous usage of the body and blood of our Lord, he tells them that they did incur the judgement of God; which he calls *eating and drinking their own judgement*. For that the word *κρίμα*, which our translators render *damnation*, does not here signify eternal damnation, but a temporal judgement and chastisement, in order to the prevention of eternal damnation, is evident from what follows: *He that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh judgement to himself*: and then he says, *For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep*: that is, for this irreverence of theirs, God had sent among them several diseases, of which many had died. And then he adds, *For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged. If we would judge ourselves; whether this be meant of the public censures of the church,*

church, or our private censuring of ourselves, in order to our future amendment and reformation, is not certain. If of the latter, which I think most probable, then *judging* here is much the same with *examining themselves*, ver. 28. And then the Apostle's meaning is, that if we would censure and examine ourselves, so as to be more careful for the future, we should escape the judgement of God in these temporal punishments. *But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world.* But when we are judged: that is, when, by neglecting thus to judge ourselves, we provoke God to judge us; *we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world*; that is, he inflicts these temporal judgements upon us, to prevent our eternal condemnation: which plainly shews, that the judgement here spoken of is not eternal condemnation. And then he concludes, *Wherefore, my brethren, when ye come together to eat, tarry for one another. And if any man hunger, let him eat at home; that ye come not together unto judgement*: where the Apostle plainly shews, both what was the crime of unworthy receiving, and the punishment of it. Their crime was, their irreverent and disorderly participation of the sacrament; and their punishment was, those temporal judgements which God inflicted upon them for this their contempt of the sacrament.

Now, this being, I think, very plain, we are proportionably to understand the precept of examination of ourselves, *before we eat of that bread, and drink of that cup. But let a man examine himself*; that is, "Consider well
 " with himself what a sacred action he is going about,
 " and what behaviour becomes him when he is celebrating this sacrament instituted by our Lord, in memorial of his body and blood, that is, of his death
 " and passion; and if heretofore he have been guilty of
 " any disorder and irreverence (such as the Apostle here
 " taxes them withal) let him censure and *judge himself*
 " for it, be sensible of, and sorry for his fault, and be
 " careful to avoid it for the future: and having thus
 " *examined himself, let him eat of that bread, and drink*
 " *of that cup.*" This, I think, is the plain sense of the Apostle's discourse; and that, if we attend to the scope

and circumstances of it, it cannot well have any other meaning.

But some will say, Is this all the preparation that is required to our worthy receiving of the sacrament, that we take care not to come drunk to it, nor to be guilty of any irreverence or disorder in the celebration of it? I answer in short, This was the particular unworthiness with which the Apostle taxeth the Corinthians; and which he warns them to amend, as they desire to escape the judgements of God, such as they had already felt for this irreverent carriage of theirs, so unsuitable to the holy sacrament. He finds no other fault with them at present in this matter; though any other sort of irreverence will proportionably expose men to the like punishment. He says nothing here of their habitual preparation, by the sincere purpose and resolution of a good life, answerable to the rules of the Christian religion. This we may suppose he took for granted. However, it concerns the sacrament no more than it does prayer, or any other religious duty. Not but that it is very true, that none but those who do heartily embrace the Christian religion, and are sincerely resolved to frame their lives according to the holy rules and precepts of it, are fit to communicate in this solemn acknowledgment and profession of it. So that it is a practice very much to be countenanced and encouraged; because it is of great use for Christians, by way of preparation for the sacrament, to examine themselves in a larger sense, than in all probability the Apostle here intended: I mean, to examine our past lives, and the actions of them, in order to a sincere repentance of all our errors and miscarriages, and to fix us in the steady purpose and resolution of a better life: particularly, when we expect to have the forgiveness of our sins sealed to us, we should lay aside all enmity, and thoughts of revenge, and heartily forgive those that have offended us; and put in practice that universal love and charity which is represented to us by this holy communion. And to this purpose we are earnestly exhorted, in the public office of the communion, by way of due preparation and disposition for it, “to repent us truly of our
“ sins past, to amend our lives, and to be in perfect
“ charity

“charity with all men, that so we may be meet partakers of those holy mysteries.”

And because this work of examining ourselves concerning our state and condition, and of exercising repentance towards God, and charity towards men, is incumbent upon us as we are Christians, and can never be put in practice more seasonably, and with greater advantage, than when we are meditating of this sacrament; therefore, besides our habitual preparation by repentance, and the constant endeavours of a holy life, it is a very pious and commendable custom in Christians, before their coming to the sacrament, to set apart some particular time for this work of examination. But how much time every person shall allot to this purpose, is matter of prudence; and as it need not, so neither indeed can it be precisely determined. Some have greater reason to spend more time upon this work than others; I mean those whose accounts are heavier, because they have long run upon the score, and neglected themselves: and some also have more leisure and freedom for it, by reason of their easy condition and circumstances in the world; and therefore are obliged to allow a greater portion of time for the exercise of piety and devotion. In general, no man ought to do a work of so great moment and concernment slightly and perfunctorily. And in this, as in all other actions, the end is principally to be regarded. Now, the end of examining ourselves, is, to understand our state and condition, and to reform whatever we find amiss in ourselves. And provided this end be obtained, the circumstances of the means are less considerable: whether more or less time be allowed to this work, is matter not so much, as to make sure that the work be thoroughly done.

And I do on purpose speak thus cautiously in this matter, because some pious persons do perhaps err on the stricter hand, and are a little superstitious on that side, insomuch that, unless they can gain so much time to set apart for a solemn preparation, they will refrain from the sacrament at that time, though otherwise they be habitually prepared. This I doubt not proceeds from a pious mind. But, as the Apostle says in another case about the sacrament, *Shall I praise them in this? I praise them*

them not : for, provided there be no wilful neglect of due preparation, it is much better to come so prepared as we can, nay I think it is our duty so to do, rather than to abstain upon this punctilio. For, when all is done, the best preparation for the sacrament is, the general care and endeavour of a good life : and he that is thus prepared, may receive at any time when opportunity is offered, though he had no particular foresight of that opportunity. And I think in that case such a one shall do much better to receive than to refrain ; because he is habitually prepared for the sacrament, though he had no time to make such actual preparation as he desired. And if this were not allowable, how could ministers communicate with sick persons at all times, or persuade others to do it many times upon very short and sudden warning ?

And indeed we cannot imagine that the primitive Christians, who received the sacrament so frequently, that for ought appears to the contrary, they judged it as essential and necessary a part of their public worship, as any other part of it whatsoever, even as their hymns and prayers, and reading and interpreting the word of God ; I say, we cannot well conceive how they, who celebrated it so constantly, could allot any more time for a solemn preparation for it, than they did for any other part of divine worship : and consequently, that the Apostle, when he bids the Corinthians examine themselves, could mean no more, than that, considering the nature and ends of this institution, they should come to it with great reverence ; and, reflecting upon their former miscarriages in this matter, should be careful, upon his admonition, to avoid them for the future, and to amend what had been amiss : which to do, requires rather resolution and care, than any long time of preparation.

I speak this, that devout persons may not be entangled in an apprehension of a greater necessity than really there is, of a long and solemn preparation every time they receive the sacrament. The great necessity that lies upon men, is to live as becomes Christians, and then they can never be absolutely unprepared. Nay, I think this to be a very good preparation ; and I see not why men should not be very well satisfied with it, unless they intend to
make

make the same use of the sacrament that many of the Papists do of confession and absolution; which is, to quit with God once or twice a year, that so they may begin to sin again upon a new score.

But because the examination of ourselves is a thing so very useful, and the time which men are wont to set apart for their preparation for the sacrament, is so advantageous an opportunity for the practice of it; therefore I cannot but very much commend those who take this occasion to search and try their ways, and to call themselves to a more solemn account of their actions: because this ought to be done some time, and I know no fitter time for it than this. And perhaps some would never find time to recollect themselves, and to take the condition of their souls into serious consideration, were it not upon this solemn occasion.

The sum of what I have said is this, that supposing a person to be habitually prepared, by a religious disposition of mind, and the general course of a good life, this more solemn actual preparation is not always necessary; and it is better when there is an opportunity to receive without it, than not to receive at all. But the greater our actual preparation is, the better: for no man can examine himself too often, and understand the state of his soul too well, and exercise repentance, and renew the resolutions of a good life too frequently. And there is perhaps no fitter opportunity for the doing of all this, than when we approach the Lord's table, there to commemorate his death, and to renew our covenant with him, to live as becomes the gospel.

All the reflection I shall now make upon this discourse, shall be, from the consideration of what hath been said, earnestly to excite all that profess and call themselves Christians to a due preparation of themselves for this holy sacrament, and a frequent participation of it according to the intention of our Lord and Saviour in the institution of it, and the undoubted practice of Christians in the primitive and best times, when men had more devotion, and fewer scruples about their duty.

If we do in good earnest believe that this sacrament was instituted by our Lord in remembrance of his dying love, we cannot but have a very high value and esteem
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for it upon that account. Methinks so often as we read in the institution of it those words of our dear Lord, *Do this in remembrance of me*, and consider what he who said them did for us, this dying charge of our best friend should stick with us, and make a strong impression upon our minds; especially if we add to these, those other words of his, not long before his death, *Greater love than this hath no man, that a man lay down his life for his friend. Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you.* It is a wonderful love which he hath expressed to us, and worthy to be had in perpetual remembrance. And all that he expects from us, by way of thankful acknowledgment, is to celebrate the remembrance of it by the frequent participation of this blessed sacrament. And shall this charge, laid upon us by him who laid down his life for us, lay no obligation upon us to the solemn remembrance of that unparallelled kindness which is the fountain of so many blessings and benefits to us? It is a sign we have no great sense of the benefit, when we are so unmindful of our benefactor, as to forget him days without number. The obligation he hath laid upon us is so vastly great, not only beyond all requital, but beyond all expression, that if he had commanded us some very grievous thing, we ought, with all the readiness and chearfulness in the world, to have done it: how much more when he hath imposed upon us so easy a commandment, a thing of no burden, but of immense benefit? when he hath only said to us, *Eat, O friends, and drink, O beloved?* when he only invites us to his table, to the best and most delicious feast that we can partake of on this side heaven?

If we seriously believe the great blessings which are there exhibited to us, and ready to be conferred upon us, we should be so far from neglecting them, that we should heartily thank God for every opportunity he offers to us of being made partakers of such benefits. When such a price is put into our hands, shall we want hearts to make use of it? Methinks we should long with David, (who saw but a shadow of these blessings), to be satisfied with the good things of God's house, and to drawn near his altar; and should cry out with him; *O when shall I come and appear before thee! My soul longeth, yea even fainteth*

fainteth for the courts of the Lord; and my flesh crieth out for the living God. And if we had a just esteem of things, we should account it the greatest infelicity and judgement in the world to be debarred of this privilege, which yet we do deliberately and frequently deprive ourselves of.

We exclaim against the church of Rome with great impatience, and with a very just indignation, for robbing the people of half of this blessed sacrament, and taking from them the *cup of blessing, the cup of salvation*; and yet we can patiently endure for some months, nay years, to exclude ourselves wholly from it. If no such great benefits and blessings belong to it, why do we complain of them for hindering us of any part of it? but if there do, why do we by our own neglect deprive ourselves of the whole?

In vain do we bemoan the decay of our graces, and our slow progress and improvement in Christianity, whilst we wilfully despise the best means of our growth in goodness. Well do we deserve that God should send leanness into our souls, and make them to consume and pine away in perpetual doubting and trouble, if, when God himself doth spread so bountiful a table for us, and set before us the bread of life, we will not come and feed upon it with joy and thankfulness.

S E R M O N XXVI.

A discourse against transubstantiation.

CONCERNING the sacrament of the Lord's supper, one of the two great positive institutions of the Christian religion, there are two main points of difference between us and the church of Rome. One about the doctrine of transubstantiation; in which they think, but are not certain, that they have the scripture, and the words of our Saviour on their side: the other about the administration of this sacrament to the people in both kinds; in
which

which we are sure that we have the scripture, and our Saviour's institution on our side; and that so plainly, that our adversaries themselves do not deny it.

Of the first of these I shall now treat, and endeavour to shew, against the church of Rome, that in this sacrament there is no substantial change made of the elements of bread and wine into the natural body and blood of Christ; that body which was born of the Virgin Mary, and suffered upon the cross; for so they explain that hard word *transubstantiation*.

Before I engage in this argument, I cannot but observe what an unreasonable task we are put upon, by the bold confidence of our adversaries, to dispute a matter of sense; which is one of those things about which Aristotle hath long since pronounced that there ought to be no dispute.

It might well seem strange, if any man should write a book, to prove, that an egg is not an elephant, and that a musket bullet is not a pike: it is every whit as hard a case, to be put to maintain, by a long discourse, that what we see, and handle, and taste to be bread, is bread, and not the body of a man; and what we see and taste to be wine, is wine, and not blood: and if this evidence may not pass for sufficient, without any farther proof, I do not see why any man, that hath confidence enough to do so, may not deny any thing to be what all the world sees it is; or affirm any thing to be what all the world sees it is not: and this without all possibility of being farther confuted. So that the business of transubstantiation is not a controversy of scripture against scripture, or of reason against reason, but of downright impudence against the plain meaning of scripture, and all the sense and reason of mankind.

It is a most self-evident falsehood: and there is no doctrine or proposition in the world that is of itself more evidently true, than transubstantiation is evidently false: and yet if it were possible to be true, it would be the most ill-natured and pernicious truth in the world, because it would suffer nothing else to be true. It is like the Roman Catholic church, which will needs be the whole Christian church, which will allow no other society of Christians to be any part of it: so transubstantiation, if
it

it be true at all, it is all truth, and nothing else is true; for it cannot be true, unless our senses, and the senses of all mankind, be deceived about their proper objects; and if this be true and certain, then nothing else can be so: for if we be not certain of what we see, we can be certain of nothing.

And yet, notwithstanding all this, there are a company of men in the world so abandoned, and given up by God to the efficacy of delusion, as in good earnest to believe this gross and palpable error, and to impose the belief of it upon the Christian world, under no less penalties than of temporal death and eternal damnation. And therefore, to undeceive, if possible, these deluded souls, it will be necessary to examine the pretended grounds of so false a doctrine, and to lay open the monstrous absurdity of it.

And in the handling of this argument, I shall proceed in this plain method.

1. I shall consider the pretended grounds and reasons of the church of Rome for this doctrine.

2. I shall produce our objections against it. And if I can shew that there is no tolerable grounds for it, and that there are invincible objections against it, then every man is not only in reason excused from believing this doctrine, but hath great cause to believe the contrary.

First, I will consider the pretended grounds and reasons of the church of Rome for this doctrine. Which must be one or more of these five. Either, 1. The authority of scripture. Or, 2. The perpetual belief of this doctrine in the Christian church, as an evidence that they always understood and interpreted our Saviour's words, *This is my body*, in this sense. Or, 3. The authority of the present church to make and declare new articles of faith. Or, 4. The absolute necessity of such a change as this in the sacrament, to the comfort and benefit of those who receive this sacrament. Or, 5. To magnify the power of the priest in being able to work so great a miracle.

I. They pretend for this doctrine the authority of scripture in those words of our Saviour, *This is my body*. Now, to shew the insufficiency of this pretence, I shall endeavour to make good these two things.

1. That there is no necessity of understanding those words of our Saviour in the sense of transubstantiation.

2. That there is a great deal of reason, nay that it is very absurd and unreasonable not to understand them otherwise.

1. That there is no necessity to understand those words of our Saviour in the sense of transubstantiation. If there be any, it must be from one of these two reasons. Either, because there are no figurative expressions in scripture, which I think no man ever yet said: or else, because a sacrament admits of no figures; which would be very absurd for any man to say, since it is of the very nature of a sacrament to represent and exhibit some invisible grace and benefit by an outward sign and figure; and especially since it cannot be denied, but that in the institution of this very sacrament our Saviour useth figurative expressions, and several words which cannot be taken strictly and literally. When he gave the cup, he said, *This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you and for many, for the remission of sins.* Where, first, the cup is put for the wine contained in the cup: or else if the words be literally taken, so as to signify a substantial change, it is not of the wine, but of the cup; and that, not into the blood of Christ, but into the new testament or new covenant in his blood. Besides, that his blood is said then to be shed, and his body to be broken; which was not till his passion, which followed the institution and first celebration of this sacrament.

But that there is no necessity to understand our Saviour's words in the sense of transubstantiation, I will take the plain concession of a great number of the most learned writers of the church of Rome in this controversy. Bellarmine, (*de euch. l. 3. c. 23.*) Suarez, (*in 3. dis. 49. qu. 75. sect. 2.*) and Vasquez, (*in 3. part. disp. 180. qu. 75. art. 2. c. 15.*) do acknowledge Scotus the great schoolman to have said that this doctrine cannot be evidently proved from scripture: and Bellarmine grants this not to be improbable; and Suarez and Vasquez acknowledge Durandus to have said as much, (*in sent. l. 4. dist. 11. qu. 1. n. 15.*) Ocham, another famous schoolman, says expressly, (*in 4. sent. qu. 5. & Quodl. 4. qu. 3.*) that "the doctrine which holds the substance of
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“ the bread and wine to remain after consecration, is
 “ neither repugnant to reason nor to scripture.” Petrus
 ab Alliaco, Cardinal of Cambray, says plainly, (*in sent.*
4. qu. 6. art. 2.) that “ the doctrine of the substance of
 “ bread and wine remaining after consecration, is more
 “ easy, and free from absurdity, more rational, and no
 “ ways repugnant to the authority of scripture ;” nay
 more, that for the other doctrine, *viz.* of transubstantia-
 tion, “ there is no evidence in scripture.” Gabriel Biel,
 another great schoolman and divine of their church,
 freely declares, (*in canon. miss. lect. 40.*), that “ as to
 “ any thing expressed in the canon of the scriptures, a
 “ man may believe that the substance of bread and wine
 “ doth remain after consecration :” and therefore he re-
 solves the belief of transubstantiation into some other re-
 velation besides scripture, which he supposeth the church
 had about it. Cardinal Cajetan confesseth, (*in Aquin.*
3. part. qu. 75. art. 1.) that “ the gospel doth no
 “ where express that the bread is changed into the body
 “ of Christ ; that we have this from the authority of the
 “ church :” nay, he goes farther, “ that there is nothing
 “ in the gospel which inforceth any man to understand
 “ these words of Christ, *This is my body*, in a proper, and
 “ not in a metaphorical sense ; but the church having
 “ understood them in a proper sense, they are to be so
 “ explained.” Which words in the Roman edition of
 Cajetan are expunged by order of Pope Pius V. (*Ægid.*
Coninc. de sacram. qu. 75. art. 1. n. 13.) Cardinal
 Contarenus, (*de sacram. l. 2. c. 3.*) and Melchior Ca-
 nus. (*loc. theolog. l. 3. c. 3.*) one of the best and most
 judicious writers that church ever had, reckoned this
 doctrine among those “ which are not so expressly found
 “ in scripture.” I will add but one more of great au-
 thority in the church, and a reputed martyr, Fisher, Bi-
 shop of Rochester, who ingeniously confesseth, (*contra*
captiv. Babylon. c. 10. n. 2.) that, in the words of the
 institution, “ there is not one word from whence the true
 “ presence of the flesh and blood of Christ in our mass
 “ can be proved.” So that we need not much contend
 that this doctrine hath no certain foundation in scripture,
 when this is so fully and frankly acknowledged by our
 adversaries themselves.

2. If there be no necessity of understanding our Saviour's words in the sense of transubstantiation, I am sure there is a great deal of reason to understand them otherwise: Whether we consider the like expressions in scripture; as where our Saviour says he is *the door* and *the true vine*, which the church of Rome would mightily have triumphed in, had it been said, *This is my true body*. And so likewise where the church is said to be *Christ's body*; and the rock which followed the Israelites to be Christ, 1 Cor. x. 4. *They drank of that rock which followed them, and that rock was Christ*. All which, and innumerable more like expressions in scripture, every man understands in a figurative, and not in a strictly literal and absurd sense. And it is very well known, that in the Hebrew language things are commonly said to be that which they do signify and represent; and there is not in that language a more proper and usual way of expressing a thing to signify so and so, than to say that it is so and so. Thus Joseph, expounding Pharaoh's dream to him, Gen. xli. 26. says, *The seven good kine are seven years, and the seven good ears of corn are seven years*; that is, they signified or represented seven years of plenty; and so Pharaoh understood him, and so would any man of sense understand the like expressions. Nor do I believe that any sensible man, who had never heard of transubstantiation being grounded upon these words of our Saviour, *This is my body*, would, upon reading the institution of the sacrament in the gospel, ever have imagined any such thing to be meant by our Saviour in those words; but would have understood his meaning to have been, *This bread signifies my body, This cup signifies my blood*; and this which ye see me now do, do ye hereafter for a memorial of me. But, surely, it would never have entered into any man's mind to have thought, that our Saviour did literally hold himself in his hand, and give away himself from himself with his own hands. Or whether we compare these words of our Saviour with the ancient form of the passover used by the Jews from Ezra's time, as Justin Martyr tells us, (*dialog. cum Tryp. p. 297. edit. Paris. 1639.*) Τοῦτο τὸ πάσχα ὁ σωτὴρ ἡμῶν, καὶ καταφυγὴ ἡμῶν, *This passover is our Saviour, and our refuge*. Not that they believed the paschal lamb to be substantially changed

ged either into God their Saviour who delivered them out of the land of Egypt, or into the Messias the Saviour whom they expected, and who was signified by it : but this lamb which they did eat, did represent to them, and put them in mind of that salvation which God wrought for their fathers in Egypt, when, by the slaying of a lamb, and sprinkling the blood of it upon their doors, their first-born were passed over and spared ; and did likewise foreshew the salvation of the Messias, *the Lamb of God that was to take away the sins of the world.*

And nothing is more common in all languages, than to give the name of the thing signified to the sign ; as the delivery of a deed or writing under hand and seal is called a conveyance, or making over of such an estate ; and it is really so : not the delivery of mere wax and parchment, but the conveyance of a real estate, as truly and really to all effects and purposes of law, as if the very material houses and lands themselves could be, and were actually delivered into my hands. In like manner, the names of the things themselves made over to us in the new covenant of the gospel between God and man, are given to the signs or seals of that covenant. By baptism Christians are said to be *made partakers of the Holy Ghost*, Heb. vi. 4. And by the sacrament of the Lord's supper, we are said to communicate, or to be made partakers of the body of Christ which was broken, and of his blood which was shed for us ; that is, of the real benefits of his death and passion. And thus St Paul speaks of this sacrament, 1 Cor. x. 16. *The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ ?* But still it is bread, and he still calls it so ; ver. 17. *For we being many are one bread, and one body : for we are partakers of that one bread.* The church of Rome might, if they pleased, as well argue from hence, that all Christians are substantially changed first into bread, and then into the natural body of Christ, by their participation of the sacrament ; because they are said thereby to be *one bread, and one body.* And the same Apostle, in the next chapter, after he had spoken of the consecration of the elements, still calls them *the bread, and the cup*, in three verses together : *As often as ye eat*

this bread, and drink this cup, ver. 26. Whosoever shall eat this bread and drink this cup of the Lord unworthily, ver. 27. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup, ver. 28. And our Saviour himself, when he had said, This is my blood of the new testament, immediately adds, Matth. xxvi. 29. But I say unto you, I will not henceforth drink of this fruit of the vine, until I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom; that is, not till after his resurrection, which was the first step of his exaltation into the kingdom given him by his Father, when the scripture tells us he did eat and drink with his disciples. But that which I observe from our Saviour's words is, that after the consecration of the cup, and the delivering of it to his disciples to drink of it, he tells them, that he would thenceforth drink no more of that fruit of the vine, which he had now drank with them, till after his resurrection. From whence it is plain, that it was the fruit of the vine, real wine, which our Saviour drank of, and communicated to his disciples in the sacrament.

Besides, if we consider that he celebrated this sacrament before his passion, it is impossible these words should be understood literally of the natural body and blood of Christ; because it was *his body broken, and his blood shed*, which he gave to his disciples; which if we understand literally of his natural body broken, and his blood shed, then these words, *This is my body which is broken, and this is my blood which is shed*, could not be true, because his body was then whole and unbroken, and his blood not then shed; nor could it be a propitiatory sacrifice, as they affirm this sacrament to be, unless they will say, that propitiation was made before Christ suffered. And it is likewise impossible that the disciples should understand these words literally, because they not only plainly saw that what he gave them was bread and wine; but they saw likewise as plainly, that it was not his body which was given, but his body which gave that which was given; not his body broken, and his blood shed, because they saw him alive at that very time, and beheld his body whole and unpierced; and therefore they could not understand these words literal-

Iy. If they did, can we imagine that the disciples, who, upon all other occasions, were so full of questions and objections, should make no difficulty of this matter, nor so much as ask our Saviour, How can these things be? that they should not tell him, We see this to be bread, and that to be wine, and we see thy body to be distinct from both; we see thy body not broken, and thy blood not shed.

From all which it must needs be very evident, to any man that will impartially consider things, how little reason there is to understand those words of our Saviour, *This is my body*, and, *This is my blood*, in the sense of transubstantiation; nay, on the contrary, that there is very great reason, and an evident necessity to understand them otherwise. I proceed to shew,

II. That this doctrine is not grounded upon the perpetual belief of the Christian church; which the church of Rome vainly pretends as an evidence that the church did always understand and interpret our Saviour's words in this sense.

To manifest the groundlessness of this pretence, I shall, 1. shew, by plain testimony of the fathers in several ages, that this doctrine was not the belief of the ancient Christian church. 2. I shall shew the time and occasion of its coming in, and by what degrees it grew up, and was established in the Roman church. 3. I shall answer their great pretended demonstration, that this always was and must have been the constant belief of the Christian church.

1. I shall shew by plain testimonies of the fathers in several ages, for above five hundred years after Christ, that this doctrine was not the belief of the ancient Christian church. I deny not but that the fathers do, and that with great reason, very much magnify the wonderful mystery and efficacy of this sacrament, and frequently speak of a great supernatural change made by the divine benediction; which we also readily acknowledge. They say indeed, that the elements of bread and wine do by the divine blessing become to us the body and blood of Christ: but they likewise say, that the names of the things signified are given to the signs: that the bread and wine do still remain in their proper nature

nature and substance, and that they are turned into the substance of our bodies; that the body of Christ in the sacrament is not his natural body, but the sign and figure of it; not that body which was crucified, nor that blood which was shed upon the cross; and that it is impious to understand the *eating of the flesh of the Son of man*, and *drinking his blood*, literally; all which are directly opposite to the doctrine of transubstantiation, and utterly inconsistent with it. I will select but some few testimonies of many things which I might bring to this purpose.

I begin with Justin Martyr, who says expressly, (*apol. 2. p. 98. edit. Paris. 1636.*), that our blood and flesh are nourished by the conversion of that food which we receive in the eucharist: but that cannot be the natural body and blood of Christ; for no man will say that that is converted into the nourishment of our bodies.

The second is Irenæus, who, speaking of this sacrament, (*lib. 4. c. 35.*), says, that “the bread which is
“ from the earth, receiving the divine invocation, is
“ now no longer common bread, but the eucharist, (or
“ sacrament), consisting of two things, the one earthly,
“ the other heavenly.” He says it is no longer common bread; but, after invocation or consecration, it becomes the sacrament, that is, bread sanctified, consisting of two things, an earthly and a heavenly; the earthly thing is bread, and the heavenly is the divine blessing which by the invocation or consecration is added to it. And elsewhere, (*lib. 5. c. 28.*), he hath this passage.
“ When therefore the cup that is mixed, (that is, of wine
“ and water), and the bread that is broken, receives the
“ word of God, it becomes the eucharist of the blood
“ and body of Christ, of which the substance of our
“ flesh is increased and consists.” But if that which we receive in the sacrament do nourish our bodies, it must be bread and wine, and not the natural body and blood of Christ. There is another remarkable testimony of Irenæus, which though it be not now extant in those works of his which remain, yet hath been preserved by Oecumenius, (*comment. in 1 Pet. c. 3.*) and it is this,
“ When (says he) the Greeks had taken some servants
“ of

“ of the Christian catechumeni, (that is, such as had not
 “ been admitted to the sacrament), and afterwards ur-
 “ ged them by violence to tell them some of the secrets
 “ of the Christians, these servants having nothing to
 “ say that might gratify those who offered violence to
 “ them, except only that they had heard from their ma-
 “ sters that the divine communion was the blood and
 “ body of Christ, they thinking that it was really blood
 “ and flesh, declared as much to those that questioned
 “ them. The Greeks taking this as if it were really done
 “ by the Christians, discovered it to others of the Greeks;
 “ who hereupon put Sanctus and Blandina to the tor-
 “ ture, to make them confess it. To whom Blandina
 “ boldly answered, How could they endure to do this,
 “ who by way of exercise (or abstinence) do not eat
 “ that flesh which may lawfully be eaten?” By which
 it appears, that this which they would have charged
 upon Christians, as if they had literally eaten the flesh
 and blood of Christ in the sacrament, was a false accu-
 sation, which these martyrs denied, saying they were so
 far from that, that they for their part did not eat any
 flesh at all.

The next is Tertullian, who proves against Marcion
 the heretic, (*l. 4. p. 571. edit. Rigal. Paris. 1634.*),
 that the body of our Saviour was not a mere phantasm
 and appearance, but a real body, because the sacrament
 is a figure and image of his body; and if there be an
 image of his body, he must have a real body, otherwise
 the sacrament would be an image of an image. His
 words are these. “ The bread which our Saviour took,
 “ and distributed to his disciples, he made his own bo-
 “ dy, saying, *This is my body*; that is, *the image or fi-*
 “ *gure of my body*. But it could not have been the fi-
 “ gure of his body, if there had not been a true and
 “ real body.” And, arguing against the Scepticks,
 who denied the certainty of sense, he useth this argu-
 ment, That if we question our senses, we may doubt
 whether our blessed Saviour were not deceived in what
 he heard, and saw, and touched. “ He might (says
 “ he, *lib. de anima, p. 319.*) be deceived in the voice
 “ from heaven, in the smell of the ointment with which
 “ he

“ he was anointed against his burial, and in the taste of
 “ the wine which he consecrated in remembrance of his
 “ blood.” So that it seems we are to trust our senses,
 even in the matter of the sacrament; and if that be true,
 the doctrine of transubstantiation is certainly false.

Origen, in his comment on Matth. xv. (*edit. Huetii.*)
 speaking of the sacrament, hath this passage. “ That
 “ food which is sanctified by the word of God and prayer,
 “ as to that of it which is material, goeth into the
 “ belly, and is cast out into the draught;” which none
 will surely say of the body of Christ. And afterwards he
 adds, by way of explication, “ It is not the matter of
 “ the bread, but the words which are spoken over it,
 “ which profiteth him that worthily eateth the Lord.
 “ And this (he says) he hath spoken concerning the ty-
 “ pical and symbolical body.” So that the matter of
 bread remaineth in the sacrament; and this Origin calls
 the typical and symbolical body of Christ. And it is not
 the natural body of Christ which is there eaten; for the
 food eaten in the sacrament, as to that of it which is ma-
 terial, goeth into the belly, and is cast out into the
 draught. This testimony is so very plain in the cause,
 that Sixtus Senensis suspects this place of Origen was de-
 praved by the heretics. Cardinal Perron is contented to
 allow it to be Origen’s; but rejects his testimony, be-
 cause he was accused of heresy by some of the fathers;
 and says he talks like a heretic in this place. So that
 with much ado this testimony is yielded to us. The
 same father, in his homilies upon Leviticus, speaks thus,
 (*cap. 10.*) “ There is also in the New Testament a let-
 “ ter which kills him who doth not spiritually under-
 “ stand those things which are said; for if we take ac-
 “ cording to the letter that which is said, *E X C E P T*
 “ *Y E E A T M Y F L E S H, A N D D R I N K*
 “ *M Y B L O O D,* this letter kills.” And this is also a
 killing testimony, and not to be answered but in Cardi-
 nal Perron’s way, by saying, “ He talks like a heretic.”

St Cyprian hath a whole epistle (63.) to Cecilius, a-
 gainst those who gave the communion in water only, with-
 out wine mingled with it; and his main argument against
 them is this; that “ the blood of Christ with which we
 “ are

“ are redeemed and quickened, cannot seem to be in the
 “ cup, when there is no wine in the cup by which the
 “ blood of Christ is represented :” and afterwards he
 says, that “ contrary to the evangelical and apostoli-
 “ cal doctrine, water was in some places offered (or gi-
 “ ven) in the Lord’s cup, which (says he) alone cannot
 “ express (or represent) the blood of Christ.” And, last-
 ly, he tells us, that “ by water the people is under-
 “ stood, by wine the blood of Christ is shewn (or repre-
 “ sented) ; but when in the cup water is mingled with
 “ wine, the people is united to Christ.” So that, accor-
 ding to this argument, wine in the sacramental cup is no
 otherwise changed into the blood of Christ, than the
 water mixed with it is changed into the people, which
 are said to be united to Christ.

I omit many others, and pass to St Austin, in the
 fourth age after Christ. And I rather insist upon his te-
 stimony, because of his eminent esteem and authority in
 the Latin church ; and he also calls the elements of the
 sacrament “ the figure and sign of Christ’s body and
 “ blood.” In his book against Adamantus the Manichee
 we have this expression, (*tom. 6. p. 187. edit. Basil. 1596.*)
 “ Our Lord did not doubt to say, *This is my body*, when
 “ he gave the sign of his body.” And in his explica-
 tion of the third psalm, speaking of Judas, whom our
 Lord admitted to his last supper, “ in which (says he
 “ *enarrat. in Ps. tom. 8. p. 16.*) he commended and
 “ delivered to his disciples the figure of his body ;” lan-
 guage which would now be censured for heresy in the
 church of Rome. Indeed he was never accused of he-
 resy, as Cardinal Perron says Origen was, but he talks as
 like one as Origen himself. And in his comment on the
 98th Psalm, speaking of the offence which the disciples
 took at that saying of our Saviour, *Except ye eat the flesh*
of the Son of man, and drink his blood, &c. he brings in
 our Saviour speaking thus to them. (*id. tom. 9. p. 1105.*)
 “ Ye must understand spiritually what I have said unto
 “ you. Ye are not to eat this body which ye see, and
 “ to drink that blood which shall be shed by those that
 “ shall crucify me. I have commended a certain sacra-
 “ ment to you, which being spiritually understood, will
 “ give you life.” What more opposite to the doctrine
 of

of transubstantiation, than that the disciples were not to eat that body of Christ which they saw, nor to drink that blood which was shed upon the cross; but that all this was to be understood spiritually, and according to the nature of a sacrament? For that body, he tells us, is not here, but in heaven, in his comment upon these words, *Me ye have not always.* “He speaks, (says he, “*in tract. 50. in Joan.*) of the presence of his body: “*Ye shall have me according to my providence, according “ to majesty and invisible grace; but according to the flesh “ which the Word assumed, according to that which was “ born of the virgin Mary, ye shall not have me.* Therefore, because he conversed with his disciples forty “ days, he is ascended up into heaven, and is not here.”

In the 23d epistle, (*id. tom. 2. p. 94.*) “If the sacrament (says he) had not some resemblance of those “ things whereof they are sacraments, they would not “ be sacraments at all: but from this resemblance they “ take for the most part the names of the things which “ they represent. Therefore as the sacrament of the “ body of Christ is in some manner or sense Christ’s “ body, and the sacrament of his blood is the blood “ of Christ; so the sacrament of faith (meaning baptism) is faith.” Upon which words of St Austin there is this remarkable gloss in their own canon law, (*de consecrat. dist. 2. Hoc est.*) “The heavenly sacrament, which truly represents the flesh of Christ, “ is called the body of Christ; but improperly. “ Whence it is said after a manner, but not according “ to the truth of the thing, but the mystery of the “ thing signified; so that the meaning is, it is called “ the body of Christ, that is, it signifies the body of “ Christ.” And if this be St Austin’s meaning, I am sure no Protestant can speak more plainly against transubstantiation. And in the ancient canon of the mass, before it was changed, in compliance with this new doctrine, it is expressly called *a sacrament, a sign, an image, and a figure of Christ’s body.* To which I will add that remarkable passage of St Austin, cited by Gratian, (*de consecrat. dist. 2. sect. Utrum.*) “That “ as we receive the similitude of his death in baptism, “ so we may also receive the likeness of his flesh and “ blood,

“ blood, that so neither may truth be wanting in the
 “ sacrament, nor Pagans have occasion to make us ri-
 “ diculous for drinking the blood of one that was slain.”

I will mention but one testimony more of this father, but so clear a one as it is impossible any man in his wits that had believed transubstantiation could have uttered. It is in his treatise *De doctrina Christiana* (lib. 3. tom. 3. p. 53.) where, laying down several rules for the right understanding of scripture, he gives this for one. “ If
 “ (says he) the speech be a precept forbidding some hei-
 “ nous wickedness or crime, or commanding us to do
 “ good, it is not figurative ; but if it seem to command
 “ any heinous wickedness or crime, or to forbid that
 “ which is profitable or beneficial to others, it is figura-
 “ tive. For example : *Except ye eat the flesh of the Son*
 “ *of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you ;*
 “ this seems to command a heinous wickedness and
 “ crime ; therefore it is a figure, commanding us to
 “ communicate of the passion of our Lord, and, with
 “ delight and advantage, to lay up in our memory that
 “ his flesh was crucified and wounded for us.” So that according to St Austin’s best skill in interpreting scripture, the literal eating of the flesh of Christ, and drinking his blood, would have been a great impiety ; and therefore the expression is to be understood figuratively : not as Cardinal Perron would have it, only in opposition to the eating of his flesh and blood in the gross appearance of flesh and blood, but to the real eating of his natural body and blood under any appearance whatsoever. For St Austin doth not say, this is a figurative speech, wherein we are commanded really to feed upon the natural body and blood of Christ under the species of bread and wine, as the Cardinal would understand him ; for the speech would be literal and not figurative : but he says, this is a figurative speech, wherein we are commanded spiritually to feed upon the remembrance of his passion.

To these I will add but three or four testimonies more in the two following ages.

The first shall be of Theodoret ; who, speaking of that prophecy of Jacob concerning our Saviour, Gen. xlix. 11. *He washed his garments in wine, and his clothes*

in the blood of grapes, hath these words (*dialogue 1.*)
 “ As we call the mystical fruit of the vine, (that is,
 “ the wine in the sacrament), after consecration, the
 “ blood of the Lord, so he (*viz.* Jacob) calls the blood
 “ of the true vine (*viz.* of Christ) the blood of the
 “ grape.” But the blood of Christ is not literally and
 properly, but only figuratively, the blood of the grape,
 in the same sense as he is said to be the true vine; and
 therefore the wine in the sacrament, after consecration,
 is in like manner not literally and properly, but figura-
 tively the blood of Christ. And he explains this after-
 wards, saying, that “ our Saviour changed the names,
 “ and gave to his body the name of the symbol or sign,
 “ and to the symbol or sign the name of his body. Thus
 “ when he had called himself the vine, he called the
 “ symbol or sign his blood.” So that in the same sense
 that he called himself the vine, he called the wine, which
 is the symbol of his blood, his blood. “ For (says he)
 “ he would have those who partake of the divine myste-
 “ ries not to attend to the nature of the things which
 “ are seen, but, by the change of names, to believe the
 “ change which is made by grace; for he who called
 “ that which by nature is a body, wheat and bread,
 “ and again likewise called himself the vine, he honour-
 “ ed the symbols with the name of his body and blood:
 “ not changing nature, but adding grace to nature.”
 Where you see he says expressly, that when he called the
 symbols or elements of the sacrament, *viz.* bread and
 wine, his body and blood, he made no change in the
 nature of the things, only added grace to nature; that
 is, by the divine grace and blessing he raised them to a
 spiritual and supernatural virtue and efficacy.

The second is of the same Theodoret, in his second
 dialogue between a Catholic under the name of *Ortho-*
doxus, and an heretic under the name of *Eranistes*; who
 maintaining, that the humanity of Christ was changed
 into the substance of the divinity (which was the heresy
 of Eutyches) he illustrates the matter by this similitude.
 “ As (says he) the symbols of the Lord's body and blood
 “ are one thing before the invocation of the priest,
 “ but, after the invocation, are changed, and become
 “ another

“ another thing ; so the body of our Lord, after his
“ ascension, is changed into the divine substance.” But
what says the Catholic Orthodoxus to this ? Why, he
talks just like one of Cardinal Perron’s heretics. “ Thou
“ art (says he) caught in thy own net ; because the
“ mystical symbols after consecration do not pass out of
“ their own nature ; for they remain in their former
“ substance, figure and appearance, and may be seen and
“ handled even as before.” He does not only deny the
outward figure and appearance of the symbols to be
changed, but the nature and substance of them, even
in the proper and strictest sense of the word *substance*.
And it was necessary so to do, otherwise he had not gi-
ven a pertinent answer to the similitude urged against
him.

The next is one of their own Popes, Gelafius, who brings the same instance against the Eutychians (*biblioth. patr. tom. 4.*). “ Surely (says he) the sacraments
“ which we receive of the body and blood of our Lord
“ are a divine thing, so that by them we are made par-
“ takers of a divine nature; and yet it ceaseth not to
“ be the substance or nature of bread and wine: and
“ certainly the image and resemblance of Christ’s body
“ and blood are celebrated in the action of the myste-
“ ries;” that is, in the sacrament. To make this in-
stance of any force against the Eutychians, who held,
that the body of Christ upon his ascension ceased, and
was changed into the substance of his divinity, it was
necessary to deny, that there was any substantial change
in the sacrament of bread and wine into the body and
blood of Christ. So that here is an infallible authority,
one of their own Popes, expressly against transubstan-
tiation.

The last testimony I shall produce, is of Facundus, an African Bishop, who lived in the sixth century. Upon occasion of justifying an expression of one who had said, that Christ also received the adoption of sons, he reasons thus, (*Facund. p. 144. edit. Par. 1676*), “ Christ
“ vouchsafed to receive the sacrament of adoption both
“ when he was circumcised and baptized: and the sa-
“ crament of adoption may be called adoption, as the
“ sacrament of his body and blood, which is in the con-
K 2 “ consecrated

“secrated bread and cup, is by us called his body and
 “blood: not that the bread (says he) is properly his
 “body, and the cup his blood, but because they con-
 “tain in them the mysteries of his body and blood.
 “Hence also our Lord himself called the blessed bread
 “and cup which he gave to his disciples his body and
 “blood.” Can any man after this believe, that it
 was then, and had ever been the universal and re-
 ceived doctrine of the Christian church, that the bread
 and wine in the sacrament are substantially changed in-
 to the proper and natural body and blood of Christ?

By these plain testimonies which I have produced,
 and I might have brought a great many more to the same
 purpose, it is I think evident beyond all denial, that
 transubstantiation hath not been the perpetual belief of
 the Christian church. And this likewise is acknowl-
 edged by many great and learned men of the Roman church.
 Scotus acknowledgeth (*in sent. l. 4. dist. 11. q. 3.*) that
 this doctrine was not always thought necessary to be be-
 lieved; but that the necessity of believing it was conse-
 quent to that declaration of the church made in the
 council of Lateran, under Pope Innocent III. And Du-
 randus (*in sent. l. 4. dist. 11. q. 1. n. 15.*) freely dis-
 covers his inclination “to have believed the contrary,
 “if the church had not by that determination obliged
 “men to believe it.” Tonsal Bishop of Durham also
 yields (*de euchar. l. 1. p. 146.*) “that before the La-
 “teran council men were at liberty as to the manner
 “of Christ’s presence in the sacrament.” And Eras-
 mus, who lived and died in the communion of the Ro-
 man church, and than whom no man was better read
 in the ancient fathers, doth confess (*in 1 epist. ad Co-
 rinth. c. 7. citante etiam Salmerone, tom. 9. tract. 16.
 p. 108*) that it was “late before the church defined
 “transubstantiation, unknown to the ancients, both
 “name and thing.” And Alphonsus a Castro (*de hæ-
 res. l. 8.*) says plainly, that “concerning the tran-
 “substantiation of the bread into the body of Christ,
 “there is seldom any mention in the ancient writers.”
 And who can imagine that these learned men would
 have granted the ancient church and fathers to have been
 so much strangers to this doctrine, had they thought it to
 have

have been the perpetual belief of the church? I shall now, in the

2. Second place, give an account of the particular time and occasion of the coming in of this doctrine, and by what steps and degrees it grew up, and was advanced into an article of faith in the Romish church. The doctrine of the corporeal presence of Christ was first started upon occasion of the dispute about the worship of images. In opposition whereto, the synod of Constantinople, about the year 750, did argue thus: That our Lord having left us no other image of himself but the sacrament, in which the substance of bread is the image of his body, we ought to make no other image of our Lord. In answer to this argument, the second council of Nice, in the year 787, did declare, that the sacrament after consecration is not the image and antitype of Christ's body and blood, but is properly his body and blood. So that the corporeal presence of the body of Christ in the sacrament was first brought in to support the stupid worship of images. And indeed it could never have come in upon a more proper occasion, nor have been applied to a fitter purpose.

And here I cannot but take notice how well this agrees with Bellarmine's observation, (*de eucharist. l. 1. c. 1.*), that "none of the antients who wrote of heresies hath
" put this error (*viz.* of denying transubstantiation) in
" his catalogue; nor did any of the antients dispute a-
" gainst this error for the first 600 years." Which is very true, because there could be no occasion then to dispute against those who denied transubstantiation; since, as I have shewn, this doctrine was not in being, unless among the Eutychian heretics, for the first 600 years and more. But Bellarmine goes on and tells us, that the "first who called in question the truth of
" the body of the Lord in the eucharist, were the *Ico-*
" *nomachi*, (the opposers of images), after the year
" 700, in the council of Constantinople: for these said,
" there was one image of Christ instituted by Christ him-
" self, *viz.* the bread and wine in the eucharist, which
" represents the body and blood of Christ. Wherefore,
" from that time, the Greek writers often admonish us,
" that the eucharist is not the figure or image of the
" body

“ body of the Lord, but his true body ; as appears
 “ from the seventh synod.” Which agrees most exactly with the account which I have given of the first rise of this doctrine, which began with the corporeal presence of Christ in the sacrament, and afterwards proceeded to transubstantiation.

And as this was the first occasion of introducing this doctrine among the Greeks, so in the Latin or Roman church, Paschasius Radbertus, first a Monk, and afterwards Abbot of Corbey, was the first broacher of it, in the year 818.

And for this, besides the evidence of history, we have the acknowledgement of two very eminent persons in the church of Rome, Bellarmine and Sirmondus ; who do in effect confess, that this Paschasius was the first who wrote to purpose upon this argument : Bellarmine (*de scriptor. eccles.*) in these words, “ This author was the
 “ first who hath seriously and copiously written concern-
 “ ing the truth of Christ’s body and blood in the eu-
 “ charist :” and Sirmondus (*in vita Paschasii*) in these,
 “ He so first explained the genuine sense of the Catholic
 “ church, that he opened the way to the rest, who af-
 “ terwards in great numbers wrote upon the same ar-
 “ gument.” But though Sirmondus is pleased to say, that he only first explained the sense of the Catholic church in this point ; yet it is very plain, from the records of that age which are left to us, that this was the first time that this doctrine was broached in the Latin church. And it met with great opposition in that age, as I shall have occasion hereafter to shew : for Rabanus Maurus, Archbishop of Mentz, about the year 847, reciting the very words of Paschasius, wherein he had delivered this doctrine, hath this remarkable passage concerning the novelty of it : “ Some (says he, *Epist. ad*
 “ *Heribaldum*, c. 33.) of late, not having a right opi-
 “ nion concerning the sacrament of the body and blood
 “ of our Lord, have said, that this is the body and blood
 “ of our Lord, which was born of the Virgin Mary, and
 “ in which our Lord suffered upon the cross, and rose
 “ from the dead : which error (says he) we have oppo-
 “ sed with all our might.” From whence it is plain, by the testimony of one of the greatest and most learned bi-
 shops

shops of that age, and of eminent reputation for piety, that what is now the very doctrine of the church of Rome concerning the sacrament, was then esteemed an error broached by some particular persons, but was far from being the generally received doctrine of that age. Can any one think it possible, that so eminent a person in the church, both for piety and learning, could have condemned this doctrine as an error and a novelty, had it been the general doctrine of the Christian church, not only in that but in all former ages; and no censure passed upon him for that which is now the great burning article in the church of Rome, and esteemed by them one of the greatest and most pernicious heresies?

Afterwards, in the 1059, when Berengarius in France and Germany had raised a fresh opposition against this doctrine, he was compelled to recant it by Pope Nicholas and the council at Rome, in these words, (*Gratian. de consecrat. distinct. 2. Lanfranc. de corp. & sang. Domini. c. 5. Guilmun. de sacramen. Algar. de sacramen. l. 1. c. 19.*) “That the bread and wine which are set upon
“the altar, after the consecration, are not only the sa-
“crament, but the true body and blood of our Lord Je-
“sus Christ; and are sensibly, not only in the sacra-
“ment, but in truth, handled and broken by the hands
“of the priest, and ground or bruised by the teeth of
“the faithful.” But it seems the Pope and his council were not then skilful enough to express themselves rightly in this matter; for the gloss upon the Canon law says expressly, “That unless we understand these words of
“Berengarius (that is, in truth, of the Pope and his
“council) in a sound sense, we shall fall into a greater
“heresy than that of Berengarius: for we do not make
“parts of the body of Christ,” (*Gloss. decret. de consecrat. dist. 2. in cap. Ego Berengarius*). The meaning of which gloss I cannot imagine, unless it be this, that the body of Christ, though it be in truth broken, yet it is not broken into parts, (for we do not make parts of the body of Christ), but into wholes. Now, this new way of breaking a body, not into parts but into wholes, (which in good earnest is the doctrine of the church of Rome), though to them that are able to believe transubstantiation, it may, for any thing I know, appear to be
found

found sense; yet to us that cannot believe so, it appears to be solid nonsense.

About twenty years after, in the year 1079, Pope Gregory VII. began to be sensible of this absurdity; and therefore, in another council at Rome, made Berengarius to recant in another form, *viz.* (*Waldens. tom. 2. c. 13.*), “That the bread and wine which are placed up-
“ on the altar, are substantially changed into the true,
“ and proper, and quickening flesh and blood of our
“ Lord Jesus Christ; and, after consecration, are the
“ true body of Christ, which was born of the Virgin,
“ and which, being offered for the salvation of the
“ world, did hang upon the cross, and sits at the right
“ hand of the Father.”

So that, from the first starting of this doctrine in the second council of Nice in the year 787, till the council under Pope Gregory VII. in the year 1079, it was almost three hundred years that this doctrine was contested, and before this mishapen monster of transubstantiation could be licked into that form in which it is now settled and established in the church of Rome. Here then is a plain account of the first rise of this doctrine, and of the several steps whereby it was advanced by the church of Rome into an article of faith. I come now, in the

3. Third place, to answer the great pretended demonstration of the impossibility that this doctrine, if it had been new, should ever have come in in any age, and been received in the church; and consequently, it must of necessity have been the perpetual belief of the church in all ages. For if it had not always been the doctrine of the church, whenever it had attempted first to come in, there would have been a great stir and bustle about it, and the whole Christian world would have rose up in opposition to it. But we can shew no such time when it first came in, and when any such opposition was made to it; and therefore it was always the doctrine of the church. This demonstration Monsieur Arnauld, a very learned man in France, pretends to be unanswerable. Whether it be so or not, I shall briefly examine. And,

1st, We do assign a punctual and very likely time of the first rise of this doctrine, about the beginning of the ninth age; though it did not take firm root, nor was fully

ly settled and established till towards the end of the eleventh. And this was the mostly likely time of all others, from the beginning of Christianity, for so gross an error to appear, it being, by the confession and consent of their own historians, the most dark and dismal time that ever happened to the Christian church, both for ignorance and superstition, and vice. It came in together with idolatry, and was made use of to support it: A fit prop and companion for it. And indeed what tares might not the enemy have sown in so dark and long a night; when so considerable a part of the Christian world was lulled asleep in profound ignorance and superstition? And this agrees very well with the account which our Saviour himself gives in the parable of the tares, of the springing up of errors and corruptions in the field of the church: *While the men slept*, (Matth. xiii. 24.), the enemy did his work in the night, so that when they were awake they wondered how and whence the tares came; but, being sure they were there, and that they were not sown at first, they concluded the enemy had done it.

2dly, I have shewn likewise, that there was considerable opposition made to this error at its first coming in. The general ignorance and gross superstition of that age, rendered the generality of people more quiet and secure, and disposed them to receive any thing that came under a pretence of mystery in religion, and of greater reverence and devotion to the sacrament, and that seemed any way to countenance the worship of images, for which at that time they were zealously concerned. But, notwithstanding the security and passive temper of the people, the men most eminent for piety and learning in that time made great resistance against it. I have already named Rabanus Archbishop of Mentz, who opposed it as an error lately sprung up, and which had then gained but upon some few persons. To whom I may add Heribaldus Bishop of Auxerres in France, Jo. Scotus Erigena, and Ratramnus, commonly known by the name of Bertram; who at the same time were employed by the Emperor Charles the Bald to oppose this growing error, and wrote learnedly against it. And these were the eminent men for learning in that time. And because Monsieur Arnauld will not be satisfied unless there were some stir and bustle

bustle about it, Bertram in his preface to his book tells us, that they “ who, according to their several opinions, “ talked differently about the mystery of Christ’s body “ and blood, were divided by no small schism.”

3dly, Though, for a more clear and satisfactory answer to this pretended demonstration, I have been contented to untie this knot, yet I could without all these pains have cut it. For suppose this doctrine had silently come in, and without opposition, so that we could not assign the particular time and occasion of its first rise; yet, if it be evident, from the records of former ages, for above five hundred years together, that this was not the ancient belief of the church; and plain also, that this doctrine was afterwards received in the Roman church; though we could not tell how and when it came in, yet it would be the wildest and most extravagant thing in the world to set up a pretended demonstration of reason against plain experience and matter of fact. This is just Zeno’s demonstration of the impossibility of motion, against Diogenes walking before his eyes. For this is to undertake to prove that impossible to have been; which most certainly was. Just thus the servants in the parable might have demonstrated, that the tares were wheat; because they were sure none but good seed was sown at first, and no man could give any account of the punctual time when any tares were sown, or by whom: and if an enemy had come to do it, he must needs have met with great resistance and opposition; but no such resistance was made, and therefore there could be no tares in the field, but that which they called tares was certainly good wheat. At the same rate a man might demonstrate, that our King, his Majesty of Great Britain, is not returned into England, nor restored to his crown; because, there being so great and powerful an army possessed of his lands, and therefore obliged by interest to keep him out, it was impossible he should ever come in without a great deal of fighting and bloodshed: but there was no such thing: therefore he is not returned, and restored to his crown. And, by the like kind of demonstration, one might prove, that the Turk did not invade Christendom last year, and besiege Vienna; because, if he had, the Most Christian King, who had the greatest army in Christendom in a readiness, would certainly

tainly have employed it against him : but Monsieur Arnauld certainly knows no such thing was done ; and therefore, according to his way of demonstration, the matter of fact, so commonly reported and believed, concerning the Turks invasion of Christendom, and besieging Vienna last year, was a perfect mistake. But a man may demonstrate till his head and heart ache, before he shall ever be able to prove that which certainly is, or was, never to have been : for of all sorts of impossibles, nothing is more evidently so, than to make that which hath been not to have been. All the reason in the world is too weak to cope with so tough and obstinate a difficulty. And I have often wondered, how a man of Monsr. Arnauld's great wit and sharp judgement could prevail with himself to engage in so bad and baffled a cause ; or could think to defend it with so wooden a dagger, as his demonstration of reason, against certain experience and matter of fact : A thing, if it be possible, of equal absurdity with what he pretends to demonstrate, transubstantiation itself. I proceed to the

III. Third pretended ground of the doctrine of transubstantiation ; and that is, the infallible authority of the present church to make and declare new articles of faith. And this in truth is the ground into which the most of the learned men of their church did heretofore, and many do still resolve their belief of this doctrine ; and, as I have already shewn, do plainly say, that they see no sufficient reason, either from scripture or tradition, for the belief of it : and that they should have believed the contrary, had not the determination of the church obliged them otherwise.

But if this doctrine be obtruded upon the world, merely by virtue of the authority of the Roman church, and the declaration of the council under Pope Gregory VII. or of the Lateran council under Innocent III. then it is a plain innovation in the Christian doctrine, and a new article of faith imposed upon the Christian world. And if any church hath this power, the Christian faith may be enlarged and changed as often as men please ; and that which is no part of our Saviour's doctrine, nay any thing, though never so absurd and unreasonable, may become an article of faith, obliging all Christians to the
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belief of it, whenever the church of Rome shall think fit to stamp her authority upon it; which would make Christianity a most uncertain and endless thing.

IV. The fourth pretended ground of this doctrine is, the necessity of such a change as this in the sacrament to the comfort and benefit of those who receive it. But there is no colour for this, if the thing be rightly considered; because the comfort and benefit of the sacrament depends upon the blessing annexed to the institution. And as water in baptism, without any substantial change made in that element, may, by the divine blessing accompanying the institution, be effectual to the washing away of sin, and spiritual regeneration; so there can no reason in the world be given, why the elements of bread and wine in the Lord's supper may not, by the same divine blessing accompanying this institution, make the worthy receivers partakers of all the spiritual comfort and benefit designed to us thereby, without any substantial change made in those elements; since our Lord hath told us, that *verily the flesh profiteth nothing*. So that, if we could do so odd and strange a thing, as to eat the very natural flesh, and drink the blood of our Lord, I do not see of what greater advantage it would be to us, than what we may have by partaking of the symbols of his body and blood, as he hath appointed, *in remembrance of him*. For the spiritual efficacy of the sacrament doth not depend upon the nature of the thing received, supposing we receive what our Lord appointed, and receive it with a right preparation and disposition of mind, but upon the supernatural blessing that goes along with it, and makes it effectual to those spiritual ends for which it was appointed.

V. The fifth and last pretended ground of this doctrine is, to magnify the power of the priest in being able to work so great a miracle. And this, with great pride and pomp, is often urged by them as a transcendent instance of the divine wisdom, to find out so admirable a way to raise the power and reverence of the priest; that he should be able every day, and as often as he pleases, by repeating a few words, to work so miraculous

culous a change, and, as they love most absurdly and blasphemously to speak, to make God himself.

But this is to pretend to a power above that of God himself; for he did not, nor cannot make himself, nor do any thing that implies a contradiction, as transubstantiation evidently does in their pretending to make God. For to make that which already is, and to make that now which always was, is not only vain and trifling, if it could be done, but impossible, because it implies a contradiction.

And what if, after all, transubstantiation, if it were possible, and actually wrought by the priest, would yet be no miracle? For there are two things necessary to a miracle; that there be a supernatural effect wrought, and that this effect be evident to sense. So that though a supernatural effect be wrought, yet if it be not evident to sense, it is to all the ends and purposes of a miracle as if it were not; and can be no testimony or proof of any thing, because it stands in need of another miracle to give testimony to it, and to prove that it was wrought. And neither in scripture, nor in profane authors, nor in common use of speech, is any thing called a miracle, but what falls under the notice of our senses; a miracle being nothing else but a supernatural effect evident to sense, the great end and design whereof is to be a sensible proof and conviction to us of something that we do not see.

And, for want of this condition, transubstantiation, if it were true, would be no miracle. It would indeed be very supernatural; but, for all that, it would not be a sign or miracle: for a sign or miracle is always a thing sensible, otherwise it could be no sign. Now, that such a change as is pretended in transubstantiation, should really be wrought, and yet there should be no sign and appearance of it, is a thing very wonderful: but not to sense; for our senses perceive no change, the bread and wine in the sacrament to all our senses remaining just as they were before. And that a thing should remain to all appearance just as it was, hath nothing at all of wonder in it. We wonder indeed when we see a strange thing done, but no man wonders when he sees nothing done. So that transubstantiation, if they will needs have

it a miracle, is such a miracle as any man may work, that hath but the confidence to face men down that he works it, and the fortune to be believed. And though the church of Rome may magnify their priests upon account of this miracle, which they say they can work every day and every hour, yet I cannot understand the reason of it; for when this great work, as they call it, is done, there is nothing more appears to be done than if there were no miracle. Now, such a miracle as to all appearance is no miracle, I see no reason why a Protestant minister, as well as a Popish priest, may not work as often as he pleases; or if he can but have the patience to let it alone, it will work itself: for surely nothing in the world is easier than to let a thing be as it is, and, by speaking a few words over it, to make it just what it was before. Every man, every day, may work ten thousand such miracles.

And thus I have dispatched the first part of my discourse; which was, to consider the pretended grounds and reasons of the church of Rome for this doctrine, and to shew the weakness and insufficiency of them. I come, in the

Second place, to produce our objections against it. Which will be of so much the greater force, because I have already shewn this doctrine to be destitute of all divine warrant and authority, and of any other sort of ground sufficient in reason to justify it. So that I do not now object against a doctrine which hath a fair probability of divine revelation on its side, for that would weigh down all objections which did not plainly overthrow the probability and credit of its divine revelation; but I object against a doctrine, by the mere will and tyranny of men, imposed upon the belief of Christians, without any evidence of scripture, and against all the evidence of reason and sense.

The objections I shall reduce to these two heads: 1. The infinite scandal of this doctrine to the Christian religion; and, 2. The monstrous and insupportable absurdity of it.

I. The infinite scandal of this doctrine to the Christian religion. And that upon these four accounts: 1. Of the stupidity of this doctrine. 2. The real barbarousness of

of this sacrament and rite of our religion, upon supposition of the truth of this doctrine. 3. Of the cruel and bloody consequences of it. 4. Of the danger of idolatry; which they are certainly guilty of, if this doctrine be not true.

I. Upon account of the stupidity of this doctrine. I remember that Tully, who was a man of very good sense, instanceth in the conceit of eating God as the extremity of madness, and so stupid an apprehension as he thought no man was ever guilty of. "When we call (says he, *De nat. deorum*, l. 3.) the fruits of the earth Ceres, and wine Bacchus, we use but the common language; but do you think any man so mad as to believe that which he eats to be God?" It seems he could not believe that so extravagant a folly had ever entered into the mind of man. It is a very severe saying of Averroes the Arabian philosopher, who lived after this doctrine was entertained among Christians, and ought to make the church of Rome blush, if she can: "I have travelled (says he, *Dionys. Carthus. in 4. dist. 10. art. 1.*) over the world, and have found divers sects; but so sottish a sect or law I never found, as is the sect of the Christians; because with their own teeth they devour their God whom they worship." It was great stupidity in the people of Israel to say, *Come let us make us gods*; but it was civilly said of them, *Let us make us gods, that may go before us*, in comparison of the church of Rome, who say, *Let us make a god, that we may eat him*. So that upon the whole matter, I cannot but wonder that they should chuse thus to expose faith to the contempt of all that are endued with reason. And, to speak the plain truth, the Christian religion was never so horribly exposed to the scorn of Atheists and infidels, as it hath been by this most absurd and senseless doctrine. But thus it was foretold (2 Thess. ii. 9. 10.) that *the man of sin* should come *with power, and signs, and lying miracles, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness*; with all the legerdemain and juggling tricks of falsehood and imposture; amongst which, this of transubstantiation, which they call a miracle, and we a cheat, is one of the chief. And, in all probability, those common juggling words of *Hocus-pocus*, are nothing else

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but a corruption of *Hoc est corpus*, by way of ridiculous imitation of the priests of the church of Rome in their trick of transubstantiation. Into such contempt, by this foolish doctrine and pretended miracle of theirs, have they brought the most sacred and venerable mystery of our religion.

2. It is very scandalous likewise, upon account of the real barbarousness of this sacrament and rite of our religion, upon supposition of the truth of this doctrine. Literally to *eat of the flesh of the Son of man, and to drink his blood*, St Austin, as I have shewed before, declares to be a great impiety. And the impiety and barbarousness of the thing is not in truth extenuated, but only the appearance of it, by its being done under the species of bread and wine: for the thing they acknowledge is really done, and they believe that they verily eat and drink the natural flesh and blood of Christ. And what can any man do more unworthily towards his friend? How can he possibly use him more barbarously, than to feast upon his living flesh and blood? It is one of the greatest wonders in the world, that it should ever enter into the minds of men, to put upon our Saviour's words, so easily capable of a more convenient sense, and so necessarily requiring it, a meaning so plainly contrary to reason and sense, and even to humanity itself. Had the ancient Christians owned any such doctrine, we should have heard of it from the adversaries of our religion in every page of their writings; and they would have desired no greater advantage against the Christians, than to have been able to hit them in the teeth with their feasting upon the natural flesh and blood of their Lord, and their God, and their best friend. What endless triumphs would they have made upon this subject? and with what confidence would they have set the cruelty used by Christians in their sacrament, against their god Saturn's eating his own children, and all the cruel and bloody rites of their idolatry? But that no such thing was then objected by the heathens to the Christians, is to a wise man instead of a thousand demonstrations, that no such doctrine was then believed.

3. It is scandalous also upon account of the cruel and bloody consequences of this doctrine; so contrary to the plain

plain laws of Christianity, and to one great end and design of this sacrament ; which is, to unite Christians in the most perfect love and charity to one another : whereas this doctrine hath been the occasion of the most barbarous and bloody tragedies that ever were acted in the world. For this hath been in the church of Rome the great burning article : and, as absurd and unreasonable as it is, more Christians have been murdered for the denial of it, than perhaps for all the other articles of their religion. And I think it may generally pass for a true observation, that all sects are commonly most hot and furious for those things for which there is least reason : for what men want of reason for their opinions, they usually supply and make up in rage. And it was no more than need to use this severity upon this occasion ; for nothing but the cruel fear of death could in probability have driven so great a part of mankind into the acknowledgement of so unreasonable and senseless a doctrine.

O blessed Saviour ! thou best friend and greatest lover of mankind, who can imagine thou didst ever intend that men should kill one another for not being able to believe contrary to their senses ; for being unwilling to think, that thou shouldst make one of the most horrid and barbarous things that can be imagined, a main duty and principal mystery of thy religion ; for not flattering the pride and presumption of the priest, who says he can make God ; and for not complying with the folly and stupidity of the people, who are made to believe that they eat him ?

4. Upon account of the danger of idolatry ; which they are certainly guilty of, if this doctrine be not true, and such a change as they pretend be not made in the sacrament : for if it be not, then they worship a creature instead of the Creator, God blessed for ever. But such a change I have shewn to be impossible ; or if it could be, yet they can never be certain that it is, and consequently are always in danger of idolatry. And that they can never be certain that such a change is made, is evident ; because, according to the express determination of the council of Trent, that depends upon the mind and intention of the priest, which cannot certainly be known but by revelation ; which is not pretended in this case.

And if they be mistaken in this change, through the knavery and crossness of the priest, who will not make God but when he thinks fit, they must not think to excuse themselves from idolatry, because they intended to worship God, and not a creature; for so the Persians might be excused from idolatry in worshipping the sun, because they intend to worship God, and not a creature. And so indeed we may excuse all the idolatry that ever was in the world; which is nothing else but a mistake of the Deity, and, upon that mistake, a worshipping of something as God which is not God.

II. Besides the infinite scandal of this doctrine upon the accounts I have mentioned, the monstrous absurdities of it make it insupportable to any religion. I am very well assured of the grounds of religion in general, and of the Christian religion in particular; and yet I cannot see that the foundations of any revealed religion are strong enough to bear the weight of so many and so great absurdities as this doctrine of transubstantiation would load it withal. And to make this evident, I shall not insist upon those gross contradictions, of the same body being in so many several places at once; of our Saviour's giving away himself with his own hands to every one of his disciples, and yet still keeping himself to himself; and a thousand more of the like nature: but to shew the absurdity of this doctrine, I shall only ask these few questions.

1. Whether any man have, or ever had, greater evidence of the truth of any divine revelation, than every man hath of the falsehood of transubstantiation? Infidelity were hardly possible to men, if all men had the same evidence for the Christian religion which they have against transubstantiation; that is, the clear and irresistible evidence of sense. He that can once be brought to contradict or deny his senses, is at an end of certainty; for what can a man be certain of, if he be not certain of what he sees? In some circumstances our senses may deceive us, but no faculty deceives us so little and so seldom: and when our senses do deceive us, even that error is not to be corrected without the help of our senses.

2. Supposing this doctrine had been delivered in scripture

ture in the very same words that it is decreed in the council of Trent, by what clearer evidence or stronger argument could any man prove to me that such words were in the Bible, than I can prove to him, that bread and wine, after consecration, are bread and wine still? He could but appeal to my eyes to prove such words to be in the Bible; and with the same reason and justice might I appeal to several of his senses to prove to him, that the bread and wine, after consecration, are bread and wine still.

3. Whether it be reasonable to imagine, that God should make that a part of the Christian religion, which shakes the main external evidence and confirmation of the whole? I mean the miracles which were wrought by our Saviour and his apostles, the assurance whereof did at first depend upon the certainty of sense. For if the senses of those who say they saw them were deceived, then there might be no miracles wrought; and consequently it may justly be doubted, whether that kind of confirmation which God hath given to the Christian religion, would be strong enough to prove it, supposing transubstantiation to be a part of it; because every man hath as great evidence that transubstantiation is false, as he hath that the Christian religion is true. Suppose then transubstantiation to be part of the Christian doctrine, it must have the same confirmation with the whole; and that is miracles: but of all doctrines in the world it is peculiarly incapable of being proved by a miracle. For if a miracle were wrought for the proof of it, the very same assurance which any man hath of the truth of the miracle, he hath of the falsehood of the doctrine; that is, the clear evidence of his senses. For that there is a miracle wrought, to prove, that what he sees in the sacrament is not bread, but the body of Christ, there is only the evidence of sense; and there is the very same evidence to prove, that what he sees in the sacrament is not the body of Christ, but bread. So that here would arise a new controversy, Whether a man should rather believe his senses giving testimony against the doctrine of transubstantiation, or bearing witness to a miracle wrought to confirm that doctrine? there being the very same evidence against the truth of the doctrine, which there

there is for the truth of the miracle : and then the argument for transubstantiation, and the objection against it, would just balance one another ; and consequently transubstantiation is not to be proved by a miracle, because that would be to prove to a man by something that he sees, that he doth not see what he sees. And if there were no other evidence that transubstantiation is no part of the Christian doctrine, this would be sufficient, that what proves the one, doth as much overthrow the other : and that miracles, which are certainly the best and highest external proof of Christianity, are the worst proof in the world of transubstantiation ; unless a man can renounce his senses at the same time that he relies upon them : for a man cannot believe a miracle, without relying upon sense ; nor transubstantiation, without renouncing it. So that never were any two things so ill coupled together, as the doctrine of Christianity and that of transubstantiation ; because they draw several ways, and are ready to strangle one another : for the main evidence of the Christian doctrine, which is miracles, is resolved into the certainty of sense ; but this evidence is clear and point blank against transubstantiation.

4. And lastly, I would ask what we are to think of the argument which our Saviour used to convince his disciples after his resurrection, that his body was really risen, and that they were not deluded by a ghost or apparition ? Is it a necessary and conclusive argument or not ? Luke xxiv. 38. 39. *And he said unto them, Why are ye troubled, and why do thoughts arise in your hearts ? Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself ; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have.* But now, if we suppose, with the church of Rome, the doctrine of transubstantiation to be true, and that he had instructed his disciples in it just before his death, strange thoughts might justly have risen in their hearts ; and they might have said to him, Lord, it is but a few days ago since thou didst teach us not to believe our senses, but, directly contrary to what we saw, viz. that the bread which thou gavest us in the sacrament ; though we saw it, and handled it, and tasted it to be bread, yet was not bread, but thine own natural body ; and now thou appealest to our senses, to prove that this is thy body which
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we now see. If seeing and handling be an unquestionable evidence that things are what they appear to our senses, then we were deceived before in the sacrament; and if they be not, then we are not sure now that this is thy body which we now see and handle, but it may be perhaps bread under the appearance of flesh and bones; just as in the sacrament, that which we saw, and handled, and tasted to be bread, was thy flesh and bones under the form and appearance of bread. Now, upon this supposition, it would have been a hard matter to have quieted the thoughts of the disciples: for if the argument which our Saviour used, did certainly prove to them, that what they saw and handled was his body, his very natural flesh and bones, because they saw and handled them, which it were impious to deny; it would as strongly prove, that what they saw and received before in the sacrament, was not the natural body and blood of Christ, but real bread and wine; and consequently that, according to our Saviour's arguing after his resurrection, they had no reason to believe transubstantiation before. For that very argument by which our Saviour proves the reality of his body after his resurrection, doth as strongly prove the reality of bread and wine after consecration. But our Saviour's argument was most infallibly good and true, and therefore the doctrine of transubstantiation is undoubtedly false.

Upon the whole matter, I shall only say this, that some other points between us and the church of Rome are managed with some kind of wit and subtilty; but this of transubstantiation is carried out by mere dint of impudence, and facing down of mankind.

And of this the more discerning persons of that church are of late grown so sensible, that they would now be glad to be rid of this odious and ridiculous doctrine. But the council of Trent hath rivetted it so fast into their religion, and made it so necessary and essential a point of their belief, that they cannot now part with it if they would. It is like a mill-stone hung about the neck of Popery, which will sink it at the last.

And though some of their greatest wits, as Cardinal Perron, and of late Monsieur Arnauld, have undertaken the defence of it in great volumes, yet it is an absurdity

furdity of that monstrous and massy weight, that no human authority or wit are able to support it. It will make the very pillars of St Peter's crack ; and requires more volumes to make it good, than would fill the Vatican.

And now I would apply myself to the poor deluded people of that church, if they were either permitted by their priests, or durst venture without their leave, to look into their religion, and to examine the doctrines of it. *Consider, and shew yourselves men.* Do not suffer yourselves any longer to be led blindfold, and by an implicit faith in your priests; into the belief of nonsense and contradiction. Think it enough, and too much, to let them rook you out of your money for pretended pardons and counterfeit relicks ; but let not the authority of any priest or church persuade you out of your senses. Credulity is certainly a fault as well as infidelity : and he who said, *Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet hath believed* : hath no where said, *Blessed are they that have seen, and yet have not believed* ; much less, *Blessed are they that believe directly contrary to what they see.*

To conclude this discourse : By what hath been said upon this argument, it will appear, with how little truth and reason, and regard to the interest of our common Christianity, it is so often said by our adversaries, that there are as good arguments for the belief of transubstantiation, as of the doctrine of the Trinity ; when they themselves do acknowledge with us, that the doctrine of the Trinity is grounded upon the scriptures, and that, according to the interpretation of them, by the consent of the ancient fathers : but their doctrine of transubstantiation I have plainly shewn to have no such ground ; and that this is acknowledged by very many learned men of their own church. And this doctrine of theirs being first plainly proved by us to be destitute of all divine warrant and authority, our objections against it, from the manifold contradictions of it to reason and sense, are so many demonstrations of the falsehood of it. Against all which they have nothing to put in the opposite scale, but the infallibility of their church ; for which there is even less colour of proof from scripture than for transubstantiation itself. But so fond are they of their own innovations and errors

errors, that rather than the dictates of their church, how groundless and absurd soever, should be called in question; rather than not have their will of us in imposing upon us what they please, they will overthrow any article of the Christian faith, and shake the very foundations of our common religion: a clear evidence that the church of Rome is not the true mother, since she can be so well contented that Christianity should be destroyed, rather than the point in question should be decided against her.

S E R M O N XXVII.

The Protestant religion vindicated from the charge of singularity and novelty.

Preached before the King, at Whitehall, April 2. 1680.

JOSHUA XXIV. 15.

If it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord, chuse you this day whom ye will serve.

The first sermon on this text.

THese are the words of Joshua; who, after he had brought the people of Israel through many difficulties and hazards, into the quiet possession of the promised land, like a good prince, and father of his country, was very solicitous, before his death, to lay the firmest foundation he could devise, of the future happiness and prosperity of that people, in whose present settlement he had, by the blessing of God, been so successful an instrument.

And, because he knew no means so effectual to this end, as to confirm them in the religion and worship of
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the true God, who had by so remarkable and miraculous a providence planted them in that good land ; he summons the people together, and represents to them all those considerations that might engage them and their posterity for ever to continue in the true religion. He tells them, what God had already done for them, and what he had promised to do more, if they would be faithful to him ; and, on the other hand, what fearful calamities he had threatened, and would certainly bring upon them, in case they should transgress his covenant, and go and serve other gods. And, after many arguments to this purpose, he concludes with this earnest exhortation, at the 14th verse, *Now therefore fear the Lord, and serve him in sincerity, and in truth, and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the flood, and in Egypt ; and serve ye the Lord.*

And, to give the greater weight and force to this exhortation, he does, by a very eloquent kind of insinuation, as it were once more set them at liberty, and leave them to their own election ; it being the nature of man, to stick more stedfastly to that which is not violently imposed, but is our own free and deliberate choice : *And if it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord, chuse you this day whom you will serve.*

Which words offer to our consideration these following observations.

1. It is here supposed, that a nation must be of some religion or other. Joshua does not put this to their choice, but takes it for granted.

2. That though religion be a matter of choice, yet it is neither a thing indifferent in itself, nor to a good governor, what religion his people are of. Joshua does not put it to them as if it were an indifferent matter whether they served God or idols : he had sufficiently declared before which of these was to be preferred.

3. The true religion may have several prejudices and objections against it : *If it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord ;* intimating, that, upon some accounts, and to some persons, it may appear so.

4. That the true religion hath those real advantages on its side, that it may safely be referred to any considerate man's choice. And this seems to be the true reason

son why Joshua refers it to them : not that he thought the thing indifferent, but because he was fully satisfied, that the truth and goodness of the one above the other was so evident, that there was no danger that any prudent man should make a wrong choice : *If it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord, chuse you this day whom ye will serve* ; intimating, that the plain difference of the things in competition would direct them what to chuse.

5. The example of princes and governors hath a very great influence upon the people in matters of religion. This I collect from the context. And Joshua was sensible of it : and therefore, tho' he firmly believed the true religion to have those advantages that would certainly recommend it to every impartial man's judgement ; yet, knowing that the multitude are easily imposed upon, and led into error, he thought fit to incline and determine them by his own example, and by declaring his own peremptory resolution in the case : *Chuse you this day whom ye will serve : as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.* Laws are a good security to religion ; but the example of governors is a living law, which secretly over-rules the minds of men, and bends them to a compliance with it.

— *Non sic inflectere sensus*

Humanos edicta valent, ut vita regentis :

“ The lives and actions of princes have usually a greater sway upon the minds of the people than their laws.”

All these observations are, I think, very natural, and very considerable. I shall not be able to speak to them all ; but shall proceed so far as the time and your patience will give me leave.

First, It is here supposed, that a nation must be of some religion or other. Joshua does not put it to their choice, whether they would worship any Deity at all. That had been too wild and extravagant a supposition, and which it is likely in those days had never entered into any man's mind. But he takes it for granted, that all people will be of some religion ; and then offers it to their consideration which they would pitch upon : *Chuse you this day whom ye will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served, &c.*

Religion is a thing to which men are not only formed

by education and custom ; but, as Tully says, *quo omnes duce naturâ vehimur* ; “ it is that to which we are all “ carried by a natural inclination : ” which is the true reason why some religion or other hath so universally prevailed in all ages and places of the world.

The temporal felicity of men, and the ends of government, can very hardly, if at all, be attained without religion. Take away this, and all obligations of conscience cease ; and where there is no obligation of conscience, all security of truth, and justice, and mutual confidence among men is at an end. For why should I repose confidence in that man, why should I take his word, or believe his promise, or put any of my interests and concerns into his power, who hath no other restraint upon him but that of human laws, and is at liberty in his own mind and principles to do whatever he judgeth to be expedient for his interest, provided he can but do it without danger to himself ? So that declared Atheism and infidelity doth justly bring men under a jealousy and suspicion with all mankind. And every wise man hath reason to be upon his guard against those from whom he hath no cause to expect more justice, and truth, and equity in their dealings, than he can compel them to by the mere dint and force of laws : for, by declaring themselves free from all other obligations, they give us fair warning what we are to expect at their hands, and how far we may trust them. Religion is the strongest band of human society ; and God so necessary to the welfare and happiness of mankind, as it could not have been more, if we could suppose the being of God himself to have been purposely designed and contrived for the benefit and advantage of men. So that very well may it be taken for granted, that a nation must be of some religion or other.

Secondly, Though religion be a matter of our choice, yet it is neither a thing indifferent in itself, nor to a good governor, what religion his people are of. Notwithstanding the supposition of the text, Joshua doth not leave them at liberty whether they will serve God or idols ; but, by a very rhetorical scheme of speech, endeavours to engage them more firmly to the worship of the true God.

To

To countenance and support the true religion, and to take care that the people be instructed in it, and that none be permitted to debauch and seduce men from it, properly belongs to the civil magistrate. This power the Kings of Israel always exercised, not only with allowance, but with great approbation and commendation from God himself. And the case is not altered since Christianity: the better the religion is, the better it deserves the countenance and support of the civil authority. And this power of the civil magistrate in matters of religion was never called in question, but by the enthusiasts of these latter times: and yet, among these, every father and master of a family, claims this power over his children and servants, at the same time that they deny it to the magistrate over his subjects. But I would fain know where the difference lies. Hath a master of a family more power over those under his government, than the magistrate hath? No man ever pretended it: nay, so far is it from that, that the natural authority of a father may be, and often is, limited and restrained by the laws of the civil magistrate. And why then may not a magistrate exercise the same power over his subjects in matters of religion, which every master challengeth to himself in his own family; that is, to establish the true worship of God in such manner and with such circumstances as he thinks best, and to permit none to affront it, or to seduce from it those that are under his care? And, to prevent all misunderstandings in this matter, I do not hereby ascribe any thing to the magistrate, that can possibly give him any pretence of right to reject God's true religion, or to declare what he pleases to be so, and what books he pleases to be canonical and the word of God, and, consequently, to make a false religion so current, by the stamp of his authority, as to oblige his subjects to the profession of it; because he who acknowledgeth himself to derive all his authority from God, can pretend to none against him. But if a false religion be established by law, the case here is the same as in all other laws that are sinful in the matter of them, but yet made by a lawful authority: in this case the subject is not bound to profess a false religion, but patiently to suffer for the constant profession of the true.

And, to speak freely in this matter, I cannot think, till I be better informed, which I am always ready to be, that any pretence of conscience warrants any man that is not extraordinarily commissioned, as the Apostles and first publishers of the gospel were, and cannot justify that commission by miracles as they did, to affront the established religion of a nation, though it be false, and openly to draw men off from the profession of it, in contempt of the magistrate and the law. All that persons of a different religion can in such a case reasonably pretend to, is, to enjoy the private liberty and exercise of their own conscience and religion; for which they ought to be very thankful, and to forbear the open making of proselytes to their own religion, though they be never so sure that they are in the right, till they have either an extraordinary commission from God to that purpose, or the providence of God make way for it by the permission or connivance of the magistrate. Not but that every man hath a right to publish and propagate the true religion, and to declare it against a false one; but there is no obligation upon any man to attempt this to no purpose, and when without a miracle it can have no other effect but the loss of his own life, unless he have an immediate command and commission from God to this purpose, and be endued with a power of miracles, as a public seal and testimony of that commission: which was the case of the Apostles, who, after they had received an immediate commission, were not to enter upon the execution of it, but to *stay at Jerusalem till they were endued with power from on high*. In this case, a man is to abide all hazards, and may reasonably expect both extraordinary assistance and success, as the Apostles had, and even a miraculous protection till his work be done; and, after that, if he be called to suffer martyrdom, a supernatural support under those sufferings.

And that they are guilty however of gross hypocrisy who pretend a further obligation of conscience in this matter, I shall give this plain demonstration, which relies upon concessions generally made on all hands, and by all parties. No Protestant, that I know of, holds himself obliged to go and preach up his religion, and make converts, in Spain or Italy: nor do either the Protestant

testant ministers or Popish priests think themselves bound in conscience to preach the gospel in Turkey, and to confute the Alcoran, to convert the Mahometans. And what is the reason? Because of the severity of the inquisition in Popish countries, and of the laws in Turkey. But doth the danger then alter the obligation of conscience? No, certainly; but it makes men throw off the false pretence and disguise of it. But where is a real obligation of conscience, danger should not deter men from their duty, as it did not the Apostles: which shews their case to be different from ours, and that probably this matter was stated right at first. So that whatever is pretended, this is certain, that the priests and Jesuits of the church of Rome have in truth no more obligation of conscience to make converts here in England, than in Sweden or Turkey; where it seems the evident danger of the attempt hath for these many years given them a perfect discharge from their duty in this particular. I shall join the

Third and fourth observations together, That though the true religion may have several prejudices and objections against it, yet, upon examination, there will be found those real advantages on its side, that it may safely be referred to any considerate man's choice: If it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord, chuse you this day whom ye will serve. If it seem evil unto you; intimating, that to some persons, and upon some accounts, it may appear so. But when the matter is truly represented, the choice is not difficult, nor requires any long deliberation: Chuse ye this day whom you will serve. Let but the cause be fully and impartially heard, and a wise man may determine himself upon the spot, and give his verdict without ever going from the bar.

The true religion hath always lain under some prejudices with partial and inconsiderate men; which commonly spring from one of these two causes; either the prepossessions of a contrary religion, or the contrariety of the true religion to the vitious inclinations and practices of men; which usually lies at the bottom of all prejudice against religion. Religion is an enemy to mens beloved lusts, and therefore they are enemies to

religion. I begin with the first, which is as much as I shall be able to compass at this time.

I. The prepossessions of a false religion; which commonly pretends two advantages on its side, antiquity, and universality; and is wont to object to the true religion, novelty and singularity. And both these are intimated both before and after the text: *Put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the flood, and in Egypt. And chuse you this day whom ye will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell.* Idolatry was the religion of their fathers, and had spread itself over the greatest and most ancient nations of the world, and the most famous for learning and arts, the Chaldeans and Egyptians; and was the religion of the Amorites, and the nations round about them. So that Joshua represents the Heathen religion with all its strength and advantage; and does not dissemble its confident pretence to antiquity and universality, whereby they would also insinuate the novelty and singularity of the worship of the God of Israel. And it is very well worthy our observation, that one or both of these have always been the exceptions of false religions, especially of idolatry and superstition, against the true religion. The ancient idolaters of the world pretended their religion to be ancient and universal; that their fathers served these gods, and that the worship of the God of Israel was a plain innovation upon the ancient and catholic religion of the world, and that the very first rise and original of it was within the memory of their fathers. And no doubt they were almost perpetually upon the Jews with that pert question, Where was your religion before Abraham? and telling them, that it was the religion of a very small part and corner of the world, confined within a little territory; but the great nations of the world, the Egyptians and Chaldeans, famous for all kind of knowledge and wisdom, and indeed all the nations round about them, worshipped other gods; and therefore it was an intolerable arrogance and singularity in them, to condemn their fathers, and all the world, to be of a religion different from all other nations, and hereby

hereby to separate themselves, and make a schism from the rest of mankind.

And when the gospel appeared in the world, which the Apostle to the Hebrews, to prevent the scandal of that word, calls the time of reformation, the Jews and Heathen still renewed the same objections against Christianity. The Jews urged against it, not the ancient scriptures, and the true word of God, but that which they pretended to be of much greater authority, the unwritten word, the ancient and constant traditions of their church; and branded this new religion with the name of *heresy*: *After the way* (saith St Paul) *that you call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers; believing all things that are written in the law and in the prophets.* By which we see, that they of the church of Rome were not the first who called it heresy, to reject human traditions, and to make the scriptures the rule of faith. This was done long before by their reverend predecessors, the Scribes and Pharisees.

And the Gentiles, they pretended against it both antiquity and universality, the constant belief and practice of all ages, and almost all places of the world. *Sequitur majores nostros, qui feliciter secuti sunt suos*, says Symmachus: "We follow our forefathers, who happily followed theirs;" but you bring in a new religion, never known nor heard of in the world before.

And when the Christian religion was most miserably depraved and corrupted, in that dismal night of ignorance which overspread these western parts of the world about the ninth and tenth centuries; and many pernicious doctrines and superstitious practices were introduced, to the woful defacing of the Christian religion, and making it quite another thing from what our Saviour left it; and these corruptions and abuses had continued for several ages: no sooner was a reformation attempted, but the church of Rome make the same outcry of novelty and singularity: and though we have substantially answered it a thousand times, yet we cannot obtain of them to forbear that threadbare question, Where was your religion before Luther?

I shall therefore apply myself to answer these two exceptions with all the brevity and clearness I can: and I doubt

doubt not to make it appear, that as to the point of universality, (though that be no wise necessary to justify the truth of any religion), ours is not inferior to theirs, if we take in the Christians of all ages, and of all parts of the world: and as to the point of antiquity, that our faith, and the doctrines of our religion, have clearly the advantage of theirs; all our faith being unquestionably ancient, theirs not so.

1. As to the point of universality, which they of the church of Rome, I know not for what reason, will needs make an inseparable property and mark of the true church. And they never flout at the Protestant religion with so good a grace among the ignorant people, as when they are bragging of their numbers, and despising poor Protestantism, because embraced by so few. This pestilent Northern heresy, as of late they scornfully call it, is entertained, it seems, only in this cold and cloudy corner of the world, by a company of dull stupid people, that can neither penetrate into the proofs nor the possibility of transubstantiation; whereas, to the more refined southern wits, all these difficult and obscure points are as clear as the sun at noon-day.

But to speak to the thing itself: If number be necessary to prove the truth and goodness of any religion, ours, upon inquiry, will be found not so inconsiderable as our adversaries would make it; those of the Reformed religion, according to the most exact calculations that have been made by learned men, being esteemed not much unequal in number to those of the Romish persuasion. But then, if we take in the ancient Christian church, whose faith was the same with ours, and other Christian churches at this day, which altogether are vastly greater and more numerous than the Roman church, and which agree with us, several of them in very considerable doctrines and practices in dispute between us and the church of Rome, and all of them in disclaiming that fundamental point of the Roman religion, and sum of Christianity, as Bellarmine calls it, I mean the supremacy of the Bishop of Rome over all Christians and churches in the world; then the number on our side will be much greater than on theirs.

But we will not stand upon this advantage with them.

Suppose

Suppose we were by much the fewer. So hath the true church of God often been, without any the least prejudice to the truth of their religion. What think we of the church in Abraham's time, which for ought we know, was confined to one family, and one small kingdom, that of Melchisedec king of Salem? What think we of it in Moses's time, when it was confined to one people wandering in a wilderness? What of it in Elijah's time, when, besides the two tribes that worshipped at Jerusalem, there were in the other ten but *seven thousand that had not bowed the knee to Baal*? What in our Saviour's time, when the whole Christian church consisted of twelve apostles, and seventy disciples, and some few followers beside? How would Bellarmine have despised this little flock, because it wanted one or two of his goodliest marks of the true church, universality and splendor? And what think we of the Christian church in the height of Arianism and Pelagianism, when a great part of Christendom was over-run with these errors, and the number of the orthodox was inconsiderable in comparison of the heretics? But what need I to urge these instances; as if the truth of a religion were to be estimated and carried by the major vote; which as it can be an argument to none but fools, so, I dare say, no honest and wise man ever made use of it for a solid proof of the truth and goodness of any church or religion? If multitude be an argument that men are in the right, in vain then hath the scripture said, *Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil*: for if this argument be of any force, the greater number never go wrong.

2. As to the point of antiquity. This is not always a certain mark of the true religion. For surely there was a time when Christianity began, and was a new profession; and then both Judaism and Paganism had certainly the advantage of it in point of antiquity. But the proper question in this case is, Which is the true ancient Christian faith, that of the church of Rome or ours? And to make this matter plain, it is to be considered, that a great part of the Roman faith is the same with ours; as, namely, the articles of the apostles creed, as explained by the first four general councils. And these make up our whole faith, so far as concerns matters of mere
and

and simple belief, that are of absolute necessity to salvation. And in this faith of ours there is nothing wanting that can be shewn in any ancient creed of the Christian church. And thus far our faith, and theirs of the Roman church, are undoubtedly of equal antiquity; that is, as ancient as Christianity itself.

All the question is as to the matters in difference between us: the principal whereof are, the twelve new articles of the creed of Pope Pius IV. concerning the sacrifice of the mass, transubstantiation, the communion in one kind only, purgatory, &c. not one of which is to be found in any ancient creed or confession of faith generally allowed in the Christian church. The antiquity of these we deny, and affirm them to be innovations; and have particularly proved them to be so, not only to the answering, but almost to the silencing of our adversaries.

And as for the negative articles of the Protestant religion, in opposition to the errors and corruptions of the Romish faith; these are by accident become a part of our faith and religion, occasioned by their errors; as the renouncing of the doctrines of Arianism became part of the Catholic religion, after the rise of that heresy.

So that the case is plainly this: We believe and teach all that is contained in the creeds of the ancient Christian church, and was by them esteemed necessary to salvation: and this is our religion. But now the church of Rome hath innovated in the Christian religion, and made several additions to it; and greatly corrupted it both in the doctrines and practices of it: and these additions and corruptions are their religion, as it is distinct from ours: and both because they are corruptions and novelties, we have rejected them; and our rejection of these is our reformation; and our reformation we grant, if this will do them any good, not to be so ancient as their corruptions; all reformation necessarily supposing corruptions and errors to have been before it.

And now we are at a little better leisure to answer that captious question of theirs, Where was your religion before Luther? Where-ever Christianity was; in some places more pure; in others more corrupted, but especially in

in these western parts of Christendom, overgrown for several ages with manifold errors and corruptions, which the reformation hath happily cut off, and cast away. So that though our reformation was as late as Luther, our religion is as ancient as Christianity itself. For when the additions which the church of Rome hath made to the ancient Christian faith, and their innovations in practice are pared off, that which remains of their religion is ours. And this they cannot deny to be, every title of it, the ancient Christianity.

And what other answer than this could the Jews have given to the like question, if it had been put to them by the ancient idolaters of the world, Where was your religion before Abraham? but the very same in substance which we now give to the church of Rome, That for many ages the worship of the one true God had been corrupted, and the worship of idols had prevailed, in a great part of the world; that Abraham was raised up by God to reform religion, and to reduce the worship of God to its first institution; in the doing whereof he necessarily separated himself and his family from the communion of those idolaters? So that though the reformation which Abraham began was new, yet his religion was truly ancient; as old as that of Noah, and Enoch, and Adam: which is the same in substance that we say, and with the same and equal reason.

And if they will still complain of the newness of our reformation, so do we too; and are heartily sorry it began no sooner: but, however, better late than never. Besides, it ought to be considered, that this objection of novelty lies against all reformation whatsoever, though never so necessary, and though things be never so much amiss. And it is in effect to say, that if things be once bad, they must never be better, but must always remain as they are; for they cannot be better, without being reformed; and a reformation must begin some time, and whenever it begins it is certainly new. So that if a real reformation be made, the thing justifies itself; and no objection of novelty ought to take place against that which upon all accounts was so fit and necessary to be done. And if they of the church of Rome would but speak their mind out in this manner, they are not so much
displeased

displeased at the reformation which we have made because it is new, as because it is a reformation. It was the humour of Babylon of old, (as the Prophet tells us, Jer. li. 9.) that *she would not be healed*: and this is still the temper of the church of Rome; they hate to be reformed; and rather than acknowledge themselves to have been once in an error, they will continue in it for ever. And this is that which at first made, and still continues, the breach and separation between us; of which we are no ways guilty, who have only reformed what was amiss; but they, who obstinately persist in their errors, and will needs impose them upon us, and will not let us be of their communion, unless we will say they are no errors.

II. The other prejudice against the true religion is, the contrariety of it to the vicious inclinations and practices of men.

It is too heavy a yoke, and lays too great a restraint upon human nature. And this is that which in truth lies at the bottom of all objections against religion, *Men love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil.*

But this argument will require a discourse by itself, and therefore I shall not now enter upon it; only crave your patience a little longer, whilst I make some reflections upon what hath been already delivered.

You see what are the exceptions which idolatry and superstition have always made, and do at this day still make, against the true religion; and how slight and insignificant they are.

But do we then charge the church of Rome with idolatry? Our church most certainly does so; and hath always done it from the beginning of the reformation, in her homilies, and liturgy, and canons, and in the writings of her best and ablest champions. And though I have, as impartially as I could, considered what hath been said on both sides in this controversy; yet I must confess, I could never yet see any tolerable defence made by them against this heavy charge. And they themselves acknowledge themselves to be greatly under the suspicion of it, by saying, as Cardinal Perron and others do, that the primitive Christians for some ages did neither worship images nor pray to saints, for fear of being thought to approach

approach too near the Heathen idolatry. And, which is yet more, divers of their most learned men do confess, that if transubstantiation be not true, they are as gross idolaters as any in the world. And I hope they do not expect it from us, that, in compliment to them, and to acquit them from the charge of idolatry, we should presently deny our senses, and believe transubstantiation; and if we do not believe this, they grant we have reason to charge them with idolatry.

But we own them to be a true church; which they cannot be, if they be guilty of idolatry. This they often urge us withal; and there seems at first sight to be something in it: and for that reason I shall endeavour to give so clear and satisfactory an answer to it, as that we may never more be troubled with it.

The truth is, we would fain hope, because they still retain the essentials of Christianity, and profess to believe all the articles of the Christian faith, that, notwithstanding their corruptions, they may still retain the true essence of a church: as a man may be truly and really a man, though he have the plague upon him; and for that reason be fit to be avoided by all that wish well to themselves. But if this will not do, we cannot help it. Therefore, to push the matter home, are they sure that this is a firm and good consequence, that if they be idolaters, they cannot be a true church? Then let them look to it. It is they, I take it, that are concerned to prove themselves a true church, and not we to prove it for them. And, if they will not understand it of themselves, it is fit they should be told, that there is a great difference between concessions of charity and of necessity, and that a very different use ought to be made of them. We are willing to think the best of them: but if they dislike our charity in this point, nothing against the hair. If they will forgive us this injury, we will not offend them any more: but rather than have any farther difference with them about this matter, we will for quietness sake compound it thus: That till they can clearly acquit themselves from being idolaters, they shall never more against their wills be esteemed a true church.

And now, to draw a conclusion.

If it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord, and to wor-

ship him only ; to pray to him alone, and that only in the name and mediation of Jesus Christ, as he hath given us commandment ; *because there is but one God, and one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus : If it seem evil unto you, to have the liberty to serve God in a language you can understand, and to have the free use of the holy scriptures, which are able to make men wise unto salvation, and to have the sacraments of our religion entirely administered to us, as our Lord did institute and appoint :*

And, on the other hand, if it seem good to us, to put our necks once more under that yoke which our fathers were not able to bear ; if it be really a preferment to a prince to hold the Pope's stirrup, and a privilege to be deposed by him at his pleasure, and a courtesy to be killed at his command ; if to pray without understanding, and to obey without reason, and to believe against sense ; if ignorance, and implicit faith, and an inquisition, be in good earnest such charming and desirable things : Then welcome Popery ; which, where-ever thou comest, dost infallibly bring all these wonderful privileges and blessings along with thee.

But the question is not now about the choice, but the change of our religion, after we have been so long settled in the quiet possession and enjoyment of it. Men are very loth to change even a false religion. *Hath a nation changed their gods, which yet are no gods ?* And surely there is much more reason why we should be tenacious of the truth, and hold fast that which is good.

We have the best religion in the world, the very same which the Son of God revealed, which the apostles planted and confirmed by miracles, and which the noble army of martyrs sealed with their blood ; and we have retrenched from it all false doctrines and superstitious practices which have been added since. And I think we may without immodesty say, that, upon the plain square of scripture and reason, of the tradition and practice of the first and best ages of the Christian church, we have fully justified our religion ; and made it evident to the world, that our adversaries are put to very hard shifts, and upon a perpetual disadvantage, in the defence of theirs.

I wish it were as easy for us to justify our lives as our religion. I do not mean in comparison of our adversaries, (for that, as bad as we are, I hope we are yet able to do); but in comparison of the rules of our holy religion, from which we are infinitely swerved; which I would to God we all did seriously consider and lay to heart: I say, in comparison of the rules of our holy religion, which *teach us to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, and righteously, and godly in this present world; in expectation of the blessed hope, and the glorious appearance of the great God, and our Saviour Jesus Christ.* To whom, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, &c.

S E R M O N XXVIII.

Objections against the true religion answered.

JOSHUA XXIV. 15.

If it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord, chuse you this day whom ye will serve.

The second sermon on this text.

THese words, as I have already declared in the former discourse, are the last counsel and advice which Joshua gave to the people of Israel, after he had safely conducted them into the land of Canaan. And that he might the more effectually persuade them to continue stedfast in the worship of the true God, by an eloquent kind of insinuation, he doth, as it were, once more set them at liberty, and leave them to their own choice: *If it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord, chuse you this day whom ye will serve.*

The plain sense of which words may be resolved into this proposition, That notwithstanding all the prejudices and objections against the true religion, yet it hath those

real advantages on its side, that it may safely be referred to any impartial and considerate man's choice. *If it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord*; intimating, that to some persons, and upon some accounts, it may seem so: but, when the matter is thoroughly examined, the resolution and choice cannot be difficult, nor require any long deliberation: *chuse you this day whom you will serve.*

The true religion hath always lain under some prejudices with partial and inconsiderate men, arising chiefly from these two causes; the prepossessions of a false religion; and the contrariety of the true religion to the inclinations of men, and the uneasiness of it in point of practice.

I. From the prepossessions of a false religion, which hath always been wont to lay claim to antiquity and universality, and to charge the true religion with novelty and singularity. And both these are intimated before the text: *Put away the gods whom your fathers served on the other side of the flood, and in Egypt; and chuse you this day whom ye will serve.* It was pretended, that the worship of idols was the ancient religion of the world, of those great nations the Egyptians and Chaldeans, and of all the nations round about them. But this hath already been considered at large.

II. There are another sort of prejudices against religion, more apt to stick with men of better sense and reason; and these arise principally from the contrariety of the true religion to the inclinations of men, and the uneasiness of it in point of practice. It is pretended, that religion is a heavy yoke, and lays too great a restraint upon human nature; and that the laws of it bear too hard upon the general inclinations of mankind.

I shall not at present meddle with the speculative objections against religion, upon account of the pretended unreasonableness of many things in point of belief; because the contrariety of the true religion to the inclinations of men, and the uneasiness of it in point of practice, is that which in truth lies at the bottom of Atheism and infidelity, and raises all that animosity which is in the minds of bad men against religion, and exasperates them to oppose it with all their wit and malice: *Men love*

love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil. And if this prejudice were but once removed, and men were in some measure reconciled to the practice of religion, the speculative objections against it would almost vanish of themselves: for there wants little else to enable a man to answer them, but a willingness of mind to have them answered, and that we have no interest and inclination to the contrary. And therefore I shall at present wholly apply myself to remove this prejudice against religion, from the contrariety of it to the inclinations of men, and the uneasiness of it in point of practice.

And there are two parts of this objection.

1. That a great part of the laws of religion do thwart the natural inclinations of men, which may reasonably be supposed to be from God. And,

2. That all of them together are a heavy yoke, and do lay too great a restraint upon human nature, intrenching too much upon the pleasures and liberty of it.

1. That a great part of the laws of religion do thwart the natural inclinations of men, which may reasonably be supposed to be from God. So that God seems to have set our nature and our duty at variance; to have given us appetites and inclinations one way, and laws another: which, if it were true, must needs render the practice of religion very grievous and uneasy.

The force of this objection is very smartly expressed in those celebrated verses of a noble poet of our own, which are so frequently in the mouths of many who are thought to bear no good will to religion.

O wearisom condition of humanity!

Born under one law, to another bound;

Vainly begot, and yet forbidden vanity;

Created sick, commanded to be sound!

If Nature did not take delight in blood,

She would have made more easy ways to good.

So that this objection would fain charge the sins of men upon God; first upon account of the evil inclinations of our nature; and then of the contrariety of our duty to those inclinations. And, from the beginning, man hath always been apt to lay the blame of his faults, where it

can least lie, upon goodness and perfection itself. The very first sin that ever man was guilty of, he endeavoured to throw upon God: *The woman whom thou gavest me, (saith Adam) she gave me of the tree, and I did eat.* And his posterity are still apt to excuse themselves the same way. But to return a particular answer to this objection:

1st, We will acknowledge so much of it as is true: That there is a great degeneracy and corruption of human nature, from what it was originally framed when it came out of God's hands; of which the scripture gives us this account, that it was occasioned by the voluntary transgression of a plain and easy command given by God to our first parents. And this weakness, contracted by the fall of our first parents, naturally descends upon us their posterity, and visibly discovers itself in our inclinations to evil, and impotence to that which is good.

And of this the Heathen philosophers, from the light of nature, and their own experience and observation of themselves and others, were very sensible; that human nature was very much declined from its primitive rectitude, and sunk into a weak, and drooping, and sickly state, which they called a *μετεστροφήσις*, the moulting of the wings of the soul: but yet they were so just and reasonable, as not to charge this upon God, but upon some corruption and impurity contracted by the soul in a former state before its union with the body. For the descent of the soul into these gross earthly bodies, they looked upon as partly the punishment of faults committed in a former state, and partly as the opportunity of a new trial, in order to its purgation and recovery. And this was the best account they were able to give of this matter, without the light of divine revelation.

So that the degeneracy of human nature is universally acknowledged, and God acquitted from being the cause of it. But, however, the posterity of Adam do all partake of the weakness contracted by his fall, and do still labour under the miseries and inconveniences of it. But then this degeneracy is not total: for though our faculties be much weakened and disordered, yet they are not destroyed, nor wholly perverted. Our
natural

natural judgement and conscience doth still dictate to us what is good, and what we ought to do ; and the impressions of the natural law, as to the great lines of our duty, are still legible upon our hearts. So that the law written in God's word is not contrary to the law written upon our hearts. And therefore it is not truly said, that we are born under one law, and bound to another : but the great disorder is, that our inferior faculties, our sensitive appetites and passions, are broke loose, and have got head of our reason, and are upon all occasions apt to rebel against it ; but our judgement still dictates the very same things which the law of God doth enjoin.

It is likewise very visible, that the sad effects of this degeneracy do not appear equally and alike in all. Whether from the better or worse temper of our bodies, or from some other more secret cause, I shall not determine, because I know not. But that there is a difference, is evident. For, though a proneness to evil, and some seeds of it, be in all ; yet we may plainly discover in many, very early and forward inclinations to some kinds of virtue and goodness ; which, being cultivated by education, may, under the ordinary influence of God's grace, be carried on with great ease to great perfection.

And there are others who are not so strongly bent to that which is evil, but that, by good instruction and example in their tender years, they may be swayed the other way, and without great difficulty formed to goodness.

There are some indeed, which is the hardest case, in whom there do very early appear strong propensions and inclinations to evil ; especially to some particular kinds of vice. But the case of these is not desperate ; though greater attention and care, and a much more prudent management is required in the education of such persons, to correct their evil tempers, and, by degrees, to bend their inclinations the right way. And, if the seeds of piety and virtue be but carefully sown at first, very much may be done by this means, even in the most depraved natures, towards the altering and changing of them ; however to the checking and controuling of their vicious inclinations.

inclinations. And if these persons, when they come to riper years, would pursue these advantages of education, and take some pains with themselves, and earnestly seek the assistance of God's grace, I doubt not but even these persons, by degrees, might at last get the mastery of their unhappy tempers.

For, next to the being and perfections of God, and the immortality of our own souls, there is no principle of religion that I do more firmly believe than this, that God hath that love for men, that, if we do heartily beg his assistance, and be not wanting to ourselves, he will afford it to every one of us, in proportion to our need of it; that he is always beforehand with us, and prevents every man with the gracious offers of his help. And I doubt not but many very perverse natures have thus been reclaimed. For God, who is the lover of souls, (as the son of Sirach calls him), though he may put some men under more difficult circumstances of becoming good than others, yet he leaves no man under a fatal necessity of being wicked, and perishing everlastingly. He tenderly considers every man's case and circumstances; and it is we that pull destruction upon ourselves with the works of our own hands: but, as sure as God is good and just, no man in the world is ruined for want of having sufficient help and aid afforded to him by God for his recovery.

2dly, It is likewise to be considered, that God did not design to create man in the full possession of happiness at first, but to train him up to it by the trial of his obedience. But there could be no trial of our obedience without some difficulty in our duty, either by reason of powerful temptations from without, or of crofs and perverse inclinations from within.

Our first parents, in their state of innocency, had only the trial of temptation without; to which they yielded, and were overcome; having only a natural power to have resisted the temptation, without any aid of supernatural grace. And that weakness to good, and proneness to evil, which they by wilful transgression contracted, is naturally derived to us; and we necessarily partake of the bitterness and impurity of the fountain from whence we spring. So that we now labour under a double difficulty;

difficulty; being assaulted by temptations from without, and incited by evil inclinations from within. But then, to balance these, we have a double advantage; that a greater reward is proposed to us, than for ought we know, would have been conferred on our first parents, had they continued innocent; and that we are endued with a supernatural power to conflict with these difficulties. So that, according to the merciful dispensation of God, all this conflict between our inclination and our duty does only serve to give a fairer opportunity for the fitting trial of our obedience, and for the more glorious reward of it.

3dly, God hath provided an universal remedy for this degeneracy and weakness of human nature: so that what we lost by the first Adam, is abundantly repaired to us by the second. This St Paul tells us at large, Rom. v. that *as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; so the grace of God hath abounded to all men by Jesus Christ*; and that to such a degree, as effectually to countervail the ill effects of original sin, and really to enable men, if they be not wanting to themselves, to master and subdue all the bad inclinations of nature, even in those who seem to be naturally most corrupt and depraved.

And, if this be true, we may, without any reflection upon God, acknowledge, that though he did not at first create man sick and weak; yet he having made himself so, his posterity are born so. But then God hath not left us helpless in this weak and miserable state, into which, by wilful transgression, mankind is fallen: but, as he commands us to be sound, so he affords us sufficient aids of his grace by Jesus Christ for our recovery.

And though *there is a law in our members, warring against the law of our minds, and captivating us to the law of sin and death; i. e.* though our sensitive appetite and passions are apt to rebel against the reason of our minds, and the dictates of our natural conscience; yet every Christian may say with St Paul, *Thanks be to God, who hath given us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ: i. e.* hath not left us destitute of a sufficient aid and strength to enable us to conquer the rebellious motions of

of sin, by the powerful assistance of that grace which is so plentifully offered to us in the gospel. And this is the case of all those who live under the gospel. As for others, as their case is best known to God, so we have no reason to doubt, but that his infinite goodness and mercy takes that care of them which becomes a merciful creator; though both the measures and the methods of his mercy towards them are secret, and unknown to us.

4thly, The hardest contest between man's inclination and duty, is in those who have wilfully contracted vicious habits, and by that means rendered their duty much more difficult to themselves; having greatly improved the evil inclinations of nature by wicked practice and custom. For the scripture plainly supposeth, that men may debauch even corrupt nature, and make themselves tenfold more the children of wrath, and of the devil, than they were by nature.

This is a case sadly to be deplored, but yet not utterly to be despaired of: and therefore those who, by a long progress in an evil course, are plunged into this sad condition, ought to consider, that they are not to be rescued out of it by an ordinary resolution, and a common grace of God. Their case plainly requires an extraordinary remedy. For he that is deeply engaged in vice, is like a man laid fast in a bog, who, by a faint and lazy struggling to get out, does but spend his strength to no purpose, and sinks himself the deeper into it. The only way is, by a resolute and vigorous effort to spring out, if possible, at once. And therefore in this case, to a vigorous resolution there must be joined an earnest application to God for his powerful grace and assistance, to help us out of this miserable state. And if we be truly sensible of the desperate danger of our condition, the pressing necessity of our case will be apt to inspire us with a mighty resolution: for power and necessity are neighbours, and never dwell far asunder. When men are sorely urged and pressed, they find a power in themselves which they thought they had not: like a coward driven up to a wall, who, in the extremity of distress and despair, will fight terribly, and perform wonders: or like a man lame of the gout, who, being assaulted by a present and terrible danger, forgets his
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And in this I do not speak above the rate of human nature, and what men thoroughly roused and awakened to a sense of their danger, by a mighty resolution, may morally do, through that divine grace and assistance which is ever ready to be afforded to well resolved minds, and such as are sincerely bent to return to God and their duty. More than this I cannot say for the encouragement of those who have proceeded far in an evil course: and they who have made their case so very desperate, ought to be very thankful to God that there is any remedy left for them.

5thly, From all that hath been said, it evidently appears, how malicious a suggestion it is, that God seeks the destruction of men, and hath made his laws on purpose so difficult, and cross to our inclinations, that he might have an advantage to ruin us for our disobedience to them. Alas! we are so absolutely under the power of God, and so unable to withstand it, that he may destroy us when he pleaseth, without seeking pretences for it: *for who hath resisted his will?* If goodness were not his nature, he hath power enough to bear out whatever he hath a mind to do to us. But our destruction is plainly of ourselves, and God is free from the blood of all men. And he hath not made the way to eternal life so difficult to any of us, with a design to make us miserable; but that we, by a vigorous resolution, and an unwearied diligence, and a patient continuance in well-doing, might win and wear a more glorious crown, and be fit to receive a more ample reward from his bounty and goodness: yea, in some sense, I may say, from his justice; *for God is not unrighteous, to forget our work and labour of love.* He will fully consider all the pains that any of us take in his service, and all the difficulties that we struggle with, out of love to God and goodness. So that this objection, from the clashing of our duty with our inclination, is, I hope, fully answered; since God hath provided so powerful and effectual a remedy against our natural impotency and infirmity, by the grace of the gospel.

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2. Second branch of the objection, That the laws of religion, and particularly of the Christian religion, are a heavy yoke, laying too great a restraint upon human nature, and intrenching too much upon the pleasures and liberty of it.

There was, I confess, some pretence for this objection against the Jewish religion; which, by the multitude of its positive institutions and external observances, must needs have been very burthensome. And the same objection lies against the church of Rome, who, as they have handled Christianity, by the unreasonable number of their needless and senseless ceremonies, have made the yoke of Christ heavier than that of Moses, and the gospel a more carnal commandment than the law. So that Christianity is lost among them in the trappings and accoutrements of it; with which, instead of adorning religion, they have strangely disguised it, and quite stifled it in the croud of external rites and ceremonies.

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But we do most grossly mistake the nature of pleasure and liberty, if we promise them to ourselves in any evil and wicked course: for, upon due search and trial, it will be found, that true pleasure and perfect freedom are no where to be found, but in the practice of virtue, and in the service of God. The laws of religion do not abridge us of any pleasure that a wise man can desire, and safely enjoy; I mean, without a greater evil and trouble consequent upon it. The pleasure of commanding our appetites, and governing our passions, by the rules of reason, which are the laws of God, is infinitely to be preferred before any sensual pleasure whatsoever; because it is the pleasure of wisdom and discretion, and gives us the satisfaction of having done that which is best and fittest for reasonable creatures to do. Who would not rather chuse to govern himself as Scipio did, amidst all the temptations and opportunities of sensual pleasure which his power and victories presented to him, than to wallow in all the delights of sense?

Nothing is more certain in reason and experience, than that every inordinate appetite and affection is a punishment to itself, and is perpetually crossing its own pleasure, and defeating its own satisfaction, by overshooting the mark it aims at. For instance: Intemperance in eating and drinking, instead of delighting and satisfying nature, doth but load and cloy it; and instead of quenching a natural thirst, which it is extremely pleasant to do, creates an unnatural one, which is troublesome and endless. The pleasure of revenge, as soon as it is executed, turns into grief and pity, guilt and remorse,

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remorse, and a thousand melancholy wishes that we had restrained ourselves from so unreasonable an act. And the same is as evident in other sensual excesses, not so fit to be described. We may trust Epicurus for this, that there can be no true pleasure without temperance in the use of pleasure. And God and reason have set us no other bounds concerning the use of sensual pleasures, but that we take care not to be injurious to ourselves or others, in the kind and degree of them. And it is very visible, that all sensual excess is naturally attended with a double inconvenience. As it goes beyond the limits of nature, it begets bodily pains and diseases; as it transgresseth the rules of reason and religion, it breeds guilt and remorse in the mind. And these are, beyond comparison, the two greatest evils in this world, a diseased body, and a discontented mind: and in this I am sure I speak to the inward feeling and experience of men; and say nothing but what every vicious man finds, and hath a more lively sense of than is to be expressed by words.

When all is done, there is no pleasure comparable to that of innocency, and freedom from the stings of a guilty conscience. This is a pure and spiritual pleasure, much above any sensual delight. And yet among all the delights of sense, that of health (which is the natural consequent of a sober, and chaste, and regular life) is a sensual pleasure far beyond that of any vice: for it is the life of life, and that which gives a grateful relish to all our other enjoyments. It is not indeed so violent and transporting a pleasure; but it is pure, and even, and lasting, and hath no guilt and regret, no sorrow and trouble in it, or after it; which is a worm that infallibly breeds in all vicious and unlawful pleasures, and makes them to be bitterness in the end.

All the ways of sin are so beset with thorns and difficulties on every side, there are so many unanswerable objections against vice, from the unreasonableness and ugliness of it, from the remorse that attends it, from the endless misery that follows it, that none but the rash and inconsiderate can obtain leave of themselves to commit it. It is the daughter of inadvertency, and blindness, and folly; and the mother of guilt, and repentance, and

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woe. There is no pleasure that will hold out and abide with us to the last, but that of innocency and well-doing. All sin is folly; and, as Seneca truly says, *Omnis stultitia laborat fastidio sui*, “All folly soon grows sick and weary of itself.” The pleasure of it is flight and superficial; but the trouble and remorse of it pierceth our very hearts.

And then, as to the other part of the objection, That religion restrains us of our liberty; the contrary is evidently true, that sin and vice are the greatest slavery: for he is truly a slave, who is not at liberty to follow his own judgement, and to do those things which he is inwardly convinced it is best for him to do; but is subject to the unreasonable commands, and the tyrannical power and violence of his lusts and passions; so that he is not master of himself, but other lords have got dominion over him, and he is perfectly at their beck and command. One vice or passion bids him Go, and he goes; another, Come, and he comes; and a third, Do this, and he doth it. The man is at perpetual variance with his own mind, and continually committing the things which he condemns in himself. And it is all one whether a man be subject to the will and humour of another person, or to his own lusts and passions. Only this of the two is the worse; because the tyrant is at home, and always ready at hand to domineer over him: he is got within him, and so much the harder to be vanquished and overcome.

But the service of God, and obedience to his laws, is perfect liberty; because the law of God requires nothing of us, but what is recommended to us by our own reason, and from the benefit and advantage of doing it; nothing but what is much more for our own interest to do it, than it can be for God's to command it. And if in some things God exact obedience of us more indispensably, and under severer penalties, it is because those things are in their nature more necessary to our felicity. And how could God possibly have dealt more graciously and kindly with us, than to oblige us most strictly to that which is most evidently for our good, and to make such laws for us, as, if we live in obedience to them, will infallibly make us happy? So that, taking all things into
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consideration, the interest of our bodies and our souls, of the present and the future, of this world and the other, religion is the most reasonable and wise, the most comfortable and compendious course that any man can take in order to his own happiness.

The consideration whereof ought to be a mighty endearment of our duty to us, and a most prevalent argument with us to yield a ready and chearful obedience to the laws of God; which are in truth so many acts of grace and favour to mankind, the real privileges of our nature, and the proper means and causes of our happiness; and do restrain us from nothing, but from doing mischief to ourselves, from playing the fools, and making ourselves miserable.

And therefore, instead of opposing religion, upon pretence of the unreasonable restraints of it, we ought to thank God heartily, that he hath laid so strict an obligation upon us to regard and pursue our true interest; and hath been pleased to take that care of us, as to set bounds to our loose and wild appetites by our duty; and in giving us rules to live by, hath no wise complied with our inconsiderate and foolish inclinations, to our real harm and prejudice; but hath made those things necessary for us to do, which in all respects are best for us, and which, if we were perfectly left to our own liberty, ought in all reason to be our free and first choice; and hath made the folly and inconvenience of sin so grossly palpable, that every man may see it beforehand that will but consider, and at the beginning of a bad course look to the end of it: and they that will not consider, shall be forced, from woful experience, at last to acknowledge it, when they find the dismal effects and mischievous consequences of their vices still meeting them at one turn or other.

And now, by all that hath been said upon this argument, I hope we are satisfied, that religion is no such intolerable yoke; and that, upon a due and full consideration of things, it cannot *seem evil* unto any of us *to serve the Lord*; nay, on the contrary, that it is absolutely necessary, both to our present peace and our future felicity; and that a religious and virtuous life, is not only upon all accounts the most prudent, but, after we are entered upon it, and accustomed to it, the most pleasant course
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that any man can take; and, however inconsiderate men may complain of the restraints of religion, that it is not one jot more our duty, than it is our privilege and our happiness.

And I cannot think, that, upon sober consideration, any man could see reason to thank God to be released from any of his laws, or to have had the contrary to them enjoined. Let us suppose, that the laws of God had been just the reverse of what they now are; that he had commanded us, under severe penalties, to deal falsely and fraudulently with our neighbour; to demean ourselves ungratefully to our best friends and benefactors; to be drunk every day, and to pursue sensual pleasures, to the endangering our health and life: how should we have complained of the unreasonableness of these laws, and have murmured at the slavery of such intolerable impositions? And yet now that God hath commanded us the contrary, things every way agreeable to our reason and interest, we are not pleased neither. What will content us? As our Saviour expostulates in a like case, *Whereunto shall I liken this generation? It is like unto children playing in the market-place, and calling unto their companions, We have piped unto you, and ye have not danced; we have mourned and ye have not lamented.* This is perfectly childish, to be pleased with nothing; neither to like this, nor the contrary. We are not contented with the laws of God as they are; and yet the contrary to them we should have esteemed the greatest grievance in the world.

And if this be true, that the laws of God, how contrary soever to our vicious inclinations, are really calculated for our benefit and advantage, it would almost be an affront to wise and considerate men to importune them to their interest, and with great earnestness to persuade them to that which in all respects is so visibly for their advantage. *Chuse you therefore this day whom ye will serve; God or you lusts: and take up a speedy resolution in a matter of so great and pressing a concernment: Chuse you this day.*

Where there is a great hazard in the doing of a thing, it is good to deliberate long before we undertake it: but where the thing is not only safe, but beneficial, and not

only hugely beneficial, but highly necessary ; when our life and our happiness depends upon it, and all the danger lies in the delay of it ; there we cannot be too sudden in our resolution, nor too speedy in the execution of it. That which is evidently safe, needs no deliberation ; and that which is absolutely necessary, will admit of none.

Therefore resolve upon it out of hand : *To day, whilst it is called to day, lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin :* in the days of your youth and health ; for that *is the acceptable time, that is the day of salvation :* before *the evil day comes*, and you be driven to it by the terrible apprehension and approach of death, when men fly to God only for fear of his wrath. For the greatest Atheists and infidels, when they come to die, if they have any of that reason left which they have used so ill, have commonly right opinions about God and religion. For then the confidence, as well as the comfort of Atheism leaves them, as the devil uses to do witches when they are in distress. Then, with Nebuchadnezzar, when they are recovered from being beasts, they look up to heaven, and their understanding returns to them : then they believe a God, and cannot help it ; they believe, and tremble at the thoughts of him. Thus Lucretius, one of their great authors, observes, that, when men are in distress,

Acrius advertunt animos ad religionem :

“ The thoughts of religion are then more quick and
“ pungent upon their minds.”

*Nam veræ voces tum demum pectore ab imo
Eliciuntur, & eripitur persona, manet res :*

“ Mens words then come from the bottom of their
“ hearts ; the mask is taken off, and things then appear
“ as in truth they are.”

But then perhaps it may be too late to make this choice : nay, then it can hardly be choice, but necessity. Men do not then chuse to serve the Lord, but they are urged and forced to it by their fears. They have served their lusts all their life long, and now they would fain serve themselves of God at the hour of death. They have done what they can, by their insolent contempt

tempt and defiance of the Almighty, to make themselves miserable; and now that they can stand out no longer against him, they are contented at last to be beholden to him to make them happy. The mercies of God are vast and boundless; but yet methinks it is too great a presumption in all reason, for men to design beforehand to make the mercy of God the sanctuary and retreat of a sinful life.

To draw then to a conclusion of this discourse: If safety, or pleasure, or liberty, or wisdom, or virtue, or even happiness itself, have any temptation in them, religion hath all these baits and allurements. What Tully says of philosophy, is much more true of the Christian religion, the wisdom and philosophy which is from above; *Nunquam satis laudari poterit; cui qui pareat, omne tempus ætatis sine molestia degere possit*: We can “ never praise it enough; since whoever lives according
“ to the rules of it, may pass the whole age of his life
“ (I may add, his whole duration, this life and the other)
“ without trouble.”

Philosophy hath given us several plausible rules for the attaining of peace and tranquillity of mind; but they fall very much short of bringing men to it. The very best of them fail us upon the greatest occasions. But the Christian religion hath effectually done all that which philosophy pretended to, and aimed at. The precepts and promises of the holy scriptures are every way sufficient for our comfort, and for our instruction in righteousness; to correct all the errors, and to bear us up under all the evils and adversities of human life; especially that holy and heavenly doctrine which is contained in the admirable sermons of our Saviour; *quem cum legimus, quem philosophum non contemnimus?* “ whose excellent
“ discourses when we read, what philosopher do we not
“ despise? None of the philosophers could, upon sure grounds, give that encouragement to their scholars, which our Saviour does to his disciples: *Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me, and ye shall find rest to your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.*

This is the advantage of the Christian religion sincerely believed and practised, that it gives perfect rest and tranquillity to the mind of man. It frees us from the
guilt

guilt of an evil conscience, and from the power of our lusts, and from the slavish fear of death, and of the vengeance of another world. It builds our comfort upon a rock, which will abide all storms, and remain unshaken in every condition, and will last and hold out for ever: *He that heareth these sayings of mine, and doth them (saith our Lord), I will liken him to a wise man, who built his house upon a rock.*

In short, religion makes the life of man a wise design, regular, and constant to itself; because it unites all our resolutions and actions in one great end; whereas without religion the life of man is a wild, and fluttering, and inconsistent thing, without any certain scope and design. The vicious man lives at random, and acts by chance: for he that walks by no rule, can carry on no settled and steady design. It would pity a man's heart to see how hard such men are put to it for diversion, and what a burden time is to them; and how solicitous they are to devise ways, not to spend it, but to squander it away. For their great grievance is consideration, and to be obliged to be intent upon any thing that is serious. They hurry from one vanity and folly to another; and plunge themselves into drink, not to quench their thirst, but their guilt; and are beholden to every vain man, and to every trifling occasion, that can but help to take time off their hands. Wretched and inconsiderate men! who have so vast a work before them, the happiness of all eternity to take care of and provide for, and yet are at a loss how to employ their time! So that irreligion and vice makes life an extravagant and unnatural thing, because it perverts and overthrows the natural course and order of things. For instance: According to nature, men labour to get an estate, to free themselves from temptations to rapine and injury; and that they may have wherewithal to supply their own wants, and to relieve the needs of others. But now the covetous man heaps up riches, not to enjoy them, but to have them; and starves himself in the midst of plenty, and most unnaturally cheats and robs himself of that which is his own; and makes a hard shift to be as poor and miserable with a great estate, as any man can be without it. According to the design of nature, men should eat and drink that they may live; but

but the voluptuous man only lives that he may eat and drink. Nature in all sensual enjoyments designs pleasure, which may certainly be had within the limits of virtue: but vice rashly pursues pleasure into the enemy's quarters, and never stops till the sinner be surrounded and seized upon by pain and torment.

So that take away God and religion, and men live to no purpose, without proposing any worthy and considerable end of life to themselves. Whereas the fear of God, and the care of our immortal souls, fixeth us upon one great design, to which our whole life, and all the actions of it, are ultimately referred. *Ubi unus Deus colitur*, (saith Lactantius), *ibi vita, & omnis actus, ad unum caput, & ad unam summam refertur*: "When we
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S E R M O N XXIX.

Of the difficulty of reforming vitious habits.

J E R E M I A H xlii. 23.

*Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots?
then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil.*

COnsidering the great difficulty of reclaiming those who are far gone in an evil course, it is no more than needs to use all sorts of arguments to this purpose; from the consideration of the evil of sin, and
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of the goodness of God, and his wonderful patience and long suffering towards us in the midst of our infinite provocations; from his great mercy and pity declared to us in all those gracious means and methods which he useth for our recovery, and from his readiness and forwardness, after all our rebellions, to receive us upon our repentance, and to be perfectly reconciled to us, as if we had never offended him; and from the final issue and event of a wicked life, the dismal and endless miseries of another world, into which we shall inevitably fall, except we repent in time, and return to a better mind; and, lastly, from the danger of being hardened in an evil course, past all remedy, and hopes of repentance.

And yet I am very sensible, that to discourse to men of the impossibility, or at least the extreme difficulty of rescuing themselves out of this miserable state, seems to be an odd and cross kind of argument, and more apt to drive people to despair, than to gain them to repentance.

But since the spirit of God is pleased to make use of it to this purpose, we may safely rely upon infinite wisdom for the fitness of it to awaken sinners to a sense of their condition, in order to their recovery. For here in the text, after terrible threatenings of captivity and desolation to the people of the Jews, who were extremely wicked and degenerate, through an universal depravation of manners in all ranks of men, from the highest to the lowest, so that they seemed to stand upon the brink of ruin, and to be fatally devoted to it; to add to the terror and force of these threatenings, God, by his Prophet, represents to them the infinite danger and extreme difficulty of their case, to see if he could startle them, by telling them into what a desperate condition they had plunged themselves; being, by a long custom of sinning, so far engaged in an evil course, that they had almost cut off themselves from a possibility of retreat; so that the difficulty of their change seemed next to a natural impossibility: *Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil.*

The expression is very high, and it is to be hoped somewhat hyperbolical, and above the just meaning of the words. Which are, I think, only designed to signify
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to us the extreme difficulty of making this change ; which is therefore resembled to a natural impossibility, as coming very near it, though not altogether up to it.

And that this expression is thus to be mitigated, will appear more than probable, by considering some other like passages of scripture : As where our Saviour compares the difficulty of a rich man's salvation to that which is naturally impossible, *viz. to a camel's passing through the eye of a needle* : nay, he pitcheth his expression higher, and doth not only make it a thing of equal, but of greater difficulty : *I say unto you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God*. And yet when he comes to explain this to his disciples, he tells them, that he only meant that the thing was very difficult, *How hard is it for those that have riches to be saved !* and that it was not absolutely impossible, but speaking according to human probability : *With men this is impossible, but not with God*.

And thus also it is reasonable to understand that severe passage of the apostle, Heb. vi. 4. *It is impossible for them that were once enlightened, if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance*. *It is impossible*, that is, it is very difficult.

In like manner we are to understand this high expression in the text, *Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots ? then may ye also do good that are accustomed to do evil* ; that is, this moral change of men settled and fixed in bad habits, is almost as difficult as the other.

From the words thus explained, two things will properly fall under our consideration.

1. The great difficulty of reforming vitious habits, or of changing a bad course, to those who have been deeply engaged in it, and long accustomed to it.

2. Notwithstanding the great difficulty of the thing, what ground of hope and encouragement there is left, that it may be done. So that, notwithstanding the appearing harshness of the text, the result of my discourse will be, not to discourage any, how bad soever, from attempting this change, but to put them upon it, and to persuade them to it ; and to remove out of the way that which may seem to be one of the strongest objections

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S E R M O N XXIX.

Of the difficulty of reforming vitious habits.

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But since the spirit of God is pleased to make use of it to this purpose, we may safely rely upon infinite wisdom for the fitness of it to awaken sinners to a sense of their condition, in order to their recovery. For here in the text, after terrible threatenings of captivity and desolation to the people of the Jews, who were extremely wicked and degenerate, through an universal depravation of manners in all ranks of men, from the highest to the lowest, so that they seemed to stand upon the brink of ruin, and to be fatally devoted to it; to add to the terror and force of these threatenings, God, by his Prophet, represents to them the infinite danger and extreme difficulty of their case, to see if he could startle them, by telling them into what a desperate condition they had plunged themselves; being, by a long custom of sinning, so far engaged in an evil course, that they had almost cut off themselves from a possibility of retreat; so that the difficulty of their change seemed next to a natural impossibility: *Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil.*

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1. The great difficulty of reforming vitious habits, or of changing a bad course, to those who have been deeply engaged in it, and long accustomed to it.

2. Notwithstanding the great difficulty of the thing, what ground of hope and encouragement there is left, that it may be done. So that, notwithstanding the appearing harshness of the text, the result of my discourse will be, not to discourage any, how bad soever, from attempting this change, but to put them upon it, and to persuade them to it ; and to remove out of the way that which may seem to be one of the strongest objections

tions against all endeavours of men very bad, to become better.

I. The great difficulty of reforming vicious habits, or of changing a bad course, to those who have been deeply engaged in it, and long accustomed to it. And this difficulty ariseth, partly from the general nature of habits indifferently considered, whether they be good, or bad, or indifferent; partly from the particular nature of evil and vicious habits; and partly from the natural and judicial consequences of a great progress and long continuance in an evil course. By the consideration of these three particulars, the extreme difficulty of this change, together with the true causes and reasons of it, will fully appear.

1. If we consider the nature of all habits, whether good, or bad, or indifferent. The custom and frequent practice of any thing begets in us a facility and easiness in doing it. It bends the powers of our soul, and turns the stream and current of our animal spirits such a way, and gives all our faculties a tendency and pliability to such a sort of actions. And, when we have long stood bent one way, we grow settled and confirmed in it; and cannot without great force and violence be restored to our former state and condition. For the perfection of any habit, whether good or bad, induceth a kind of necessity of acting accordingly. A rooted habit becomes a governing principle, and bears almost an equal sway in us with that which is natural. It is a kind of a new nature superinduced, and even as hard to be expelled, as some things which are primitively and originally natural. When we bend a thing at first, it will endeavour to restore itself; but it may be held bent so long till it will continue so of itself, and grow crooked; and then it may require more force and violence to reduce it to its former straightness, than we used to make it crooked at first. This is the nature of all habits; the farther we proceed, the more we are confirmed in them; and that which at first we did voluntarily, by degrees becomes so natural and necessary, that it is almost impossible for us to do otherwise. This is plainly seen in the experience of every day, in things good and bad, both in lesser and greater matters.

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2. This difficulty ariseth more especially from the particular nature of evil and vitious habits. These, because they are suitable to our corrupt nature, and conspire with the inclinations of it, are likely to be of a much quicker growth and improvement, and in a shorter space, and with less care and endeavour, to arrive at maturity and strength, than the habits of grace and goodness. Considering the propension of our depraved nature, the progress of virtue and goodness is up the hill; in which we not only move hardly and heavily, but are easily rolled back: but by wickedness and vice we move downwards; which, as it is much quicker and easier, so it is harder for us to stop in that course, and infinitely more difficult to return from it.

Not but that at first a sinner hath some considerable checks and restraints upon him, and meets with several rubs and difficulties in his way; the shame and unreasonableness of his vices, and the trouble and disquiet which they create to him. But he breaks loose from these restraints, and gets over these difficulties by degrees; and the faster and farther he advanceth in an evil course, the less trouble still they give him, till at last they almost quite lose their force, and give him little or no disturbance.

Shame also is a great restraint upon sinners at first: but that soon falls off: and when men have once lost their innocence, their modesty is not like to be long troublesome to them. For impudence comes on with vice, and grows up with it. Lesser vices do not banish all shame and modesty; but great and abominable crimes harden mens foreheads, and make them shameless. *Were they ashamed (saith the Prophet) when they committed abomination? nay, they were not ashamed, neither could they blush.* When men have the heart to do a very bad thing, they seldom want the face to bear it out.

And as for the unreasonableness of vice, though nothing in the world be more evident to a free and impartial judgement, and the sinner himself discerns it clearly enough at his first setting out in a wicked course:

— *Video meliora, proboque,
Deteriora sequor:*

“ He offends against the light of his own mind, and
“ does wickedly, when he knows better :” yet, after he
hath continued for some time in this course, and is heartily engaged in it, his foolish heart is darkened, and the notions of good and evil are obscured and confounded, and things appear to him in a false and imperfect light : his lusts do at once blind and bias his understanding ; and his judgement by degrees goes over to his inclinations, and he cannot think that there should be so much reason against those things for which he hath so strong an affection. He is now engaged in a party, and factiously concerned to maintain it, and to make the best of it ; and, to that end, he bends all his wits to advance such principles as are fittest to justify his wicked practices ; and, in all debates, plainly favours that side of the question which will give the greatest countenance and encouragement to them. When men *are corrupt, and do abominable works*, they say in their hearts, *There is no God* ; that is, they would fain think so. And every thing serves for an argument to a willing mind ; and every little objection appears strong and considerable, which makes against that which men are loth should be true.

Not that any man ever satisfied himself in the principles of infidelity, or was able to arrive to a steady and unshaken persuasion of the truth of them, so as not vehemently to doubt, and fear the contrary. However, by this means many men, though they cannot fully comfort, yet they make a shift to cheat themselves ; to still their consciences, and lay them asleep for a time, so as not to receive any great and frequent disturbance in their course, from the checks and rebukes of their own minds. And, when these restraints are removed, the work of iniquity goes on a main, being favoured both by wind and tide.

3. The difficulty of this change ariseth likewise from the natural and judicial consequences of a great progress and long continuance in an evil course. My meaning is, that inveterate evil habits do, partly from their own nature, and partly from the just judgement and permission of God, put men under several disadvantages of moving effectually towards their own recovery.

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By a long custom of sinning, mens consciences grow brawny, and *seared as it were with a hot iron*; and by being often trampled upon, they become hard as the beaten road. So that, unless it be upon some extraordinary occasion, they are seldom awakened to a sense of their guilt. And when mens hearts are thus hard, the best counsels make but little impression upon them. For they are steeled against reproof, and impenetrable to good advice; which is therefore seldom offered to them, even by those that wish them well, because they know it to be both unacceptable, and unlikely to prevail. It requires a great deal of good nature in a very bad man, to be able patiently to bear to be told of his faults.

Besides that habitual wickedness is naturally apt to banish consideration, to weaken our resolution, and to discourage our hopes both of God's grace and assistance, and of his mercy and forgiveness, which are the best means and encouragement to repentance.

Sin is a great enemy to consideration; and especially when men are deeply plunged into it, their condition is so very bad, that they are loth to think of it, and to search into it. A vitious man is a very deformed sight, and to none more than to himself; and therefore he loves to turn his eyes another way, and to divert them as much as he can from looking upon himself. He is afraid to be alone, lest his own mind should arrest him, and his conscience should take the opportunity to call him to an account. And if at any time his own thoughts meet with him, and he cannot avoid consideration, he is ready to say, as Ahab did to Elijah, *Hast thou found me, O my enemy!* and is as glad to shake it off, as a man is to get rid of a creditor, whom, because he knows not how to satisfy, he cares not to speak with him. Consideration is the great troubler and disturber of men in an evil course; because it would represent to them the plain truth of their case: and therefore they do all they can to keep it off: as those who have improvidently managed their affairs, and been ill husbands of their estates, are loth to make up their accounts, lest by that means they should be forced to understand the worst of their condition.

Or if consideration happen to take them at an advantage, and they are so hard pressed by it, that they cannot escape the sight of their own condition ; yet they find themselves so miserably intangled and hampered in an evil course, and bound so fast in the chains of their own wickedness, that they know not how to get loose. Sin is the saddest slavery in the world : it breaks and sinks men spirits ; and makes them so base and servile, that they have not the courage to rescue themselves. No sort of slaves are so poor-spirited, as they that are in bondage to their lusts. Their power is gone ; or if they have any left, they have not the heart to make use of it. And though they see and feel their misery, yet they chuse rather to sit down in it, and tamely to submit to it, than to make any resolute attempt for their liberty. What the Prophet says of whoredom and wine, is proportionably true of other vices, *They take away the heart*. Every lust that we entertain, deals with us as Delilah did with Samson ; not only robs us of our strength, but leaves us fast bound : so that, if at any time we be awakened to a sense of our condition, and try to rescue ourselves from it, we find that *our strength is departed from us*, and that we are not able to break loose.

And as long custom and continuance in sin deprives us of our strength, so it discourageth our hopes, both of God's grace and assistance, and of his mercy and forgiveness. For why should men expect the continuance of that grace which they have so often received in vain ? After so many provocations, how can we look the offended majesty of God in the face ? how can we lift up our eyes to heaven with any hopes of mercy and forgiveness there ? Despair doth almost naturally spring from an evil conscience : and when men are thoroughly awakened to a sense of sin, and of the infinite evil of it, as they cannot easily forgive themselves, so they can hardly believe that there is goodness enough any where to forgive them.

But, besides these disadvantages, which are natural, and consequent upon a vitious course, by the just judgement of God, his spirit is withdrawn from them, and they are given up to their own hearts lusts, to commit
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all iniquity with greediness. And then there is hardly any thing left, either to restrain them in their evil course, or to recover them out of it.

And not only so ; but, by the just permission of God, as men grow worse and more wicked, the devil hath a nearer access to them, and a more immediate power over them. So the scripture tells us, that wicked men are *led captive by Satan at his pleasure*, and that the *evil one works* and acts *in the children of disobedience* : they are as it were possessed and inspired by him. And what can be expected from this cruel and malicious enemy of mankind, but that he will continually be pushing them on from one wickedness to another, till he drive them first into despair, and then, if God permit him, into eternal perdition ?

And what a forlorn state is this ! when men are thus forsaken of God, and left without check, blindly and headily to follow the sway of their own tempers, and the bent of their own corrupt hearts ; when they are continually exposed to temptations, strongly inviting them to evil, and God lets the devil loose upon them, to manage those temptations with his utmost skill, and to practise all his arts and wiles upon them ? In these circumstances, men almost infallibly run into sin, as sure as men wander in the dark, and are in danger of falling in slippery places, and of being intangled, when they continually walk in the midst of snares cunningly laid for them. It is not in men thus disabled and intangled, to order their own steps, and to restrain their inclinations and passions in the presence of a powerful temptation. At the best, we need God's direction to guide us, his continual grace to uphold us, and to guard and preserve us from evil : and much more do we stand in need of it, when we have brought ourselves into these wretched circumstances ; but then, alas ! how little reason have we to hope for it ?

Blind and miserable men ! that, in despite of all the merciful warnings of God's word and providence, will run themselves into this desperate state, and never think of returning to a better mind, till their retreat is difficult, almost to an impossibility ! I proceed to the

II. Second head of my discourse ; which was, to shew, that

that the case of these persons, though it be extremely difficult, is not quite desperate; but, after all, there is some ground of hope and encouragement left, that they may yet be reclaimed, and brought to goodness. Indeed, humanly speaking, and according to all appearance and probability, the thing seems to be very hopeless, and next to an impossibility; but yet what our Saviour says concerning the difficulty of a rich man's salvation, will reach also to this case, though much more difficult; *Those things which are impossible with men, are possible with God.*

And this will appear, if we consider, that even in the worst of men there is something left which tends to reclaim them, to awaken them to consideration, and to urge and encourage them to a vigorous resolution of a better course; and this, accompanied with a powerful assistance of God's grace, which, when sincerely sought, is never to be despaired of, may prove effectual to bring back even the greatest of sinners.

1. There is left, even in the worst of men, a natural sense of the evil and unreasonableness of sin; which can hardly be ever totally extinguished in human nature. For though the habits of great vices are very apt to harden and stupify men, so that they have seldom a just sense of their evil ways; yet these persons are sometimes under strong convictions, and their consciences do severely check and rebuke them for their faults. They are also, by fits, under the great apprehension of the danger of their condition, and that the course which they are in, if they continue in it, will prove fatal to them, and ruin them at last; especially when their consciences are thoroughly awakened by some great affliction, or the near approach of death, and a lively sense of another world. And the apprehension of a mighty danger will make men to look about them, and to use the best means to avoid it.

2. Very bad men, when they have any thoughts of becoming better, are apt to conceive some good hopes of God's grace and mercy. For though they find all the causes and reasons of despair in themselves, yet the consideration of the boundless goodness and compassions of God (how undeserved soever on their part) is apt to
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kindle some sparks of hope, even in the most desponding mind. His wonderful patience, in the midst of our manifold provocations, cannot but be a good sign to us, that he hath no mind that we should perish, but rather that we should come to repentance; and, if we do repent, we are assured by his promise, that we shall be forgiven: *He that confesseth and forsaketh his sins, shall have mercy. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*

3. Who knows what men thoroughly roused and startled may resolve and do? And a mighty resolution will break through difficulties which seem insuperable. Though we be weak and pitiful creatures, yet nature, when it is mightily irritated and stirred, will do strange things. The resolutions of men upon the brink of despair, have been of an incredible force: and the soul of man in nothing more discovers its divine power and original, than in that spring which is in it, whereby it recovers itself when it is mightily urged and pressed. There is a sort of resolution which is in a manner invincible, and hardly any difficulty can resist it, or stand before it.

Of this there have been great instances in several kinds. Some, by an obstinate resolution, and taking incredible pains with themselves, have mastered great natural vices and defects: as Socrates and Demosthenes; who almost exceeded all mankind in those two things for which by nature they seemed to be least made, and most unfit; one in governing of his passions, and the other in the mighty force and power of his eloquence.

Some that, by intemperance, have brought themselves to a dropsy, which hath just set them upon the brink of the grave, by a bold and steady purpose, to abstain wholly from drink for a long time together, have rescued themselves from the jaws of death.

Some that had almost ruined themselves by a careless and dissolute life, and having run themselves out of their estates into debt, and being cast into prison, have there taken up a manly resolution, to retrieve and recover themselves; and, by the indefatigable labour and study of some years in that uncomfortable retreat, have mastered

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ed the knowledge and skill of one of the most difficult professions, in which they have afterwards proved great and eminent.

And some, in the full career of a wicked course, have, by a sudden thought and resolution raised in them, and assisted by a mighty grace of God, taken up presently, and made an immediate change from great wickedness and impiety of life, to a very exemplary degree of goodness and virtue.

The two great encouragements to virtue which Pythagoras gave to his scholars, were these: and they were worthy of so great a philosopher. First, "Chuse always the best course of life, and custom will soon make it the most pleasant." The other was this, That "power and necessity are neighbours, and never dwell far from one another." When men are pressed by a great necessity, when nature is spurred up and urged to the utmost, men discover in themselves a power which they thought they had not; and find at last that they can do that which at first they despaired of ever being able to do.

4. The grace and assistance of God, when sincerely sought, is never to be despaired of. So that if we do but heartily, and in good earnest, resolve upon a better course, and implore the help of God's grace to this purpose, no degree of it that is necessary shall be wanting to us. And here is our chief ground of hope: for we are *weak and unstable as water*; and when we have taken up good resolutions, do easily start from them. So that fresh supplies, and a continued assistance of God's grace, is necessary to keep up the first warmth and vigour of our resolutions, till they prove effectual and victorious. And this grace God hath promised he will not deny to us when we are thus disposed for it; that he *will give his Holy Spirit to them that ask it*; that he *will not quench the smoking flax, nor break the bruised reed, until he bring forth judgement unto victory*.

All that now remains is, to apply this to ourselves. And we are all concerned in it: for we shall all find ourselves comprehended under one of these three heads: either we are of the number of those few happy persons, who, by the influence and advantage of a good educa-

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tion, were never engaged in a bad course; or of those who have been drawn into vice, but are not yet far gone in it; or of those who have been long accustomed to an evil course, and are grown old and stiff in it.

1. The first of these have great cause to thank God for this singular felicity, that they were never insnared and intangled in vitious habits; that they have not had the trial of their own weakness under this miserable slavery; that they never knew what it was to be out of their own power, to have lost their liberty, and the government of themselves. When we hear of the miserable servitude of the poor Christians in Turkey, we are apt, as there is great reason, to pity them; and to think what a blessing of God it is to us, that we are not in their condition: and yet that slavery is not comparable to this, either for the sad nature or the dismal consequences of it, or for the difficulty of being released from it. And let such persons, who have been thus happy never to have been engaged in an evil course, preserve their innocency with great tenderness and care, as the greatest jewel in the world. No man knows what he does, and what a foundation of trouble he lays to himself, when he forfeits his innocency, and breaks the peace of his own mind; when he yields to a temptation, and makes the first step into a bad course. He little thinks whither his lusts may hurry him, and what a monster they may make of him before they have done with him.

2. Those who have been seduced, but are not yet deeply engaged in an evil course, let them make a speedy retreat, lest they put it for ever out of their power to return. Perhaps their feet only are yet insnared, but their hands are at liberty; and they have some power left, whereby, with an ordinary grace of God, they may loose and rescue themselves. But after a while their hands may be manacled, and all their power may be gone; and when they are thus bound hand and foot, they are just prepared, and in danger every moment, *to be cast into utter darkness.*

3. As for those who are gone very far, and are grown old in vice, who can forbear to lament over them? for they are a sad spectacle indeed, and the truest object of
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pity in the world. And yet their recovery is not utterly to be despaired of; for *with God it is possible*. The spirit of God, which hath withdrawn himself, or rather hath been driven away by them, may yet be persuaded to return, and to undertake them once more, if they would but seriously resolve upon a change, and heartily beg God's assistance to that purpose. If we would take up a mighty resolution, we might hope that God would afford a miraculous grace to second it, and make it effectual to our recovery. Even in this perverse and degenerate age in which we live, God hath not been wanting to give some miraculous instances of his grace and mercy to sinners; and those perhaps equal to any of those we meet with in scripture, of Manasses, or Mary Magdalen, or the penitent thief; both for the greatness of the offenders, and the miracle of their change; to the end that none might despair, and, for want of the encouragement of an example equal to their own case, be disheartened from so noble an enterprize. I am loth to put you in mind how bad some have been, who yet have been *snatched as fire-brands out of the fire*; and that in so strange a manner, that it would even amaze a man to think of the wonder of their recovery. Those who have sunk themselves into the very depth of infidelity and wickedness, have, by a mighty hand and out-stretched arm of God, been plucked out of this horrible pit. And will we still stand it out with God, when such great leaders have given up the cause, and have surrendered and yielded up themselves willing captives to the grace of God? that omnipotent grace of God, which can easily subdue the stoutest heart of man, by letting in so strong a light upon our minds, and pouring such terrible convictions into our consciences, that we can find no ease but in turning to God.

I hope there are none here so bad, as to need all the encouragement to repentance, which such examples might give them: encouragement, I say, to repentance; for surely these examples can encourage no man to venture any farther in a wicked course; they are so very rare, and like the instances of those who have been brought back to life after the sentence of death seemed to have been fully executed upon them.

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But perhaps some will not believe that there have been such examples ; or if there have, they impute all this, either to a disturbed imagination, or to the faint and low spirits of men under great bodily weakness, or to their natural cowardice and fear, or to I know not what foolish and fantastical design of completing and finishing a wicked life with an hypocritical death. Nothing surely is easier than to put some bad construction upon the best things ; and so slur even repentance itself, and almost dash it out of countenance, by some bold, and perhaps witty, saying about it. But *oh that men were wise ! that they understood, and would consider their latter end !* Come, let us neither trifle nor dissemble in this matter. I dare say every man's conscience is convinced, that they who have led very ill lives, have so much reason for repentance, that we may easily believe it to be real. However, of all things in the world, let us not make a mock of repentance ; that which must be our last sanctuary and refuge, and which we must all come to before we die, or *it had been better for us we had never been born.* Therefore, *let my counsel be acceptable unto you, break off your sins by repentance, and your iniquities by righteousness ;* and that instantly, and without delay, *lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.* If we have been enslaved but a little to a vitious course, we shall find it a task difficult enough to assert our own liberty, to *break these bonds in sunder, and to cast these cords from us.* But if we have been long under this bondage, we have done so much to undo ourselves, and to make our case desperate, that it is God's infinite mercy to us that there is yet hope. Therefore, *give glory to the Lord your God, before he cause darkness, and your feet stumble upon the dark mountains ; and while you look for light, he turn it into darkness and the shadow of death.* I will conclude with that encouraging invitation, even to the greatest of sinners, to repentance, from the mouth of God himself, *Is. lv. Incline your ear, and come unto me : hear, and your soul shall live. Seek the Lord while he may be found, and call upon him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts : and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have*

have mercy; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.

To him let us apply ourselves, and humbly beseech him, *who is mighty to save*, that he would stretch forth the right hand of his power for our deliverance, from this miserable and cruel bondage of our lusts; and that *as the rain cometh down from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it to bring forth and bud*; so he would grant that *his word may not return void, but accomplish his pleasure, and prosper in the thing to which he sent it*; for his mercy's sake in Jesus Christ. To whom, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, be all honour and glory, now and for ever. *Amen.*

S E R M O N XXX.

The necessity of the knowledge of the holy scriptures.

MATTH. xxiii. 13.

Wo unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites; for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men: and ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering, to go in.

THE scribes, so often mentioned in the gospel, were the great doctors among the Jews, the teachers and interpreters of the law of God. And because many of them were of the sect of the Pharisees, which above all others pretended to skill and knowledge in the law; therefore it is that our blessed Saviour does so often put the scribes and Pharisees together. And these were the men of chief authority in the Jewish church, who equalled their own unwritten word and traditions with the law of God; nay, our Saviour tells us, *they made the commandments of God of none effect by their traditions.*
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They did in effect assume to themselves infallibility; and all that opposed and contradicted them, they branded with the odious name of *heretics*. Against these our Saviour denounceth this wo here in the text, *Wo unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites: for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men, &c.*

All the difficulty in the words is, what is here meant by *shutting up the kingdom of heaven against men*. St Luke expresseth it more plainly, *Ye have taken away the key of knowledge; ye entered not in yourselves; and them that were entering in, ye hindered*. By putting these two expressions together, we shall the more easily come at the meaning of the text, *Ye have taken away the key of knowledge, and have shut up the kingdom of heaven against men*. This metaphor of the *key of knowledge* is undoubtedly an allusion to that known custom among the Jews in the admission of their doctors: for to whomsoever they gave authority to interpret the law and the prophets, they were solemnly admitted into that office, by delivering to them a key and a table book. So that by the *key of knowledge* is here meant the interpretation and understanding of the scriptures; and by *taking away the key of knowledge*, not only that they arrogated to themselves alone the understanding of the scriptures, but likewise they had conveyed away this key of knowledge, and, as it were, hid it out of the way, neither using it themselves as they ought, nor suffering others to make use of it.

And thus they *shut the kingdom of heaven against men*; which is very fitly said of those who have locked the door against them that were going in, and have taken away the key. By all which it appears, that the plain meaning of our Saviour in these metaphorical expressions is, that the scribes, and teachers of the law, under a pretence of interpreting the scriptures, had perverted them, and kept the true knowledge of them from the people; especially those prophecies of the Old Testament which concerned the Messiah. And by this means the kingdom of heaven was shut against men: and they not only rejected the truth themselves, but, by keeping men in ignorance of the true meaning of the scriptures, they hin-

dered many from embracing our Saviour's doctrine, and entering into the kingdom of heaven, who were otherwise well enough disposed for it.

Having thus explained the words, I shall, from the main scope and design of them, observe to you these two things.

1. The necessity of the knowledge of the holy scriptures, in order to our eternal salvation. It is called by our Saviour *the key of knowledge*, that which lets men into the kingdom of heaven.

2. The great and inexcusable fault of those who deprive the people of the knowledge of the holy scriptures. They *shut the kingdom of heaven against men*, and do what in them lies to hinder their eternal salvation; and therefore our Saviour denounceth so heavy a wo against them.

I shall speak briefly to these two observations; and then apply them to those who are principally concerned in them.

First, I observe hence the necessity of the knowledge of the holy scriptures, in order to our eternal salvation. This is by our Saviour called *the key of knowledge*, that which lets men into the kingdom of heaven.

Knowledge is necessary to religion; it is necessary to the being of it; and necessary to the life and practice of it. *Without faith* (says the Apostle) *it is impossible to please God*; because faith is an act of the understanding, and does necessarily suppose some knowledge and apprehension of what we believe. To all acts of religion there is necessarily required some act of the understanding; so that, without knowledge, there can be no devotion in the service of God, no obedience to his laws. Religion begins in the understanding, and from thence descends upon the heart and life: *If ye know these things*, (says our Saviour), *happy are ye if ye do them*. We must first know God, before we can worship him; and understand what is his will, before we can do it.

This is so very evident, that one would think there needed no discourse about it. And yet there are some in the world that cry up ignorance as the mother of devotion. And to shew that we do not wrong them in this matter, Mr Rushworth, in his Dialogues, (a book
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in great vogue among the Papists here in England) does expressly reckon up ignorance among the parents of religion. And can any thing be said more absurdly, and more to the disparagement of religion, than to derive the pedigree of the most excellent thing in the world, from so obscure and ignoble an original; and to make that which the scripture calls *the beginning of wisdom*, and *the excellency of knowledge*, to be the offspring of ignorance, and a child of darkness? Ignorance indeed may be the cause of wonder and admiration, and the mother of folly and superstition: but surely religion is of a nobler extraction, and is the issue and result of the best wisdom and knowledge; and descends from above, from the giver of every good and perfect gift, even the Father of lights.

And as knowledge in general is necessary to religion, so more particularly the knowledge of the holy scriptures is necessary to our eternal salvation: because these are the great and standing revelation of God to mankind; wherein the nature of God, and his will concerning our duty, and the terms and conditions of our eternal happiness in another world, are fully and plainly declared to us.

The scriptures are the word of God; and from whence can we learn the will of God so well as from his own mouth? They are the great instrument of our salvation; and should not every man be acquainted with that which alone can perfectly instruct him what he must believe, and what he must do, that he may be saved? This is the testimony which the scripture gives of itself, that it is *able to make men wise unto salvation*: and is it not very fit that every man should have this wisdom, and, in order thereunto, the free use of that book from whence this wisdom is to be learned?

Secondly, I observe the great and inexcusable fault of those who keep men in ignorance of religion, and take away from them so excellent and necessary a means of divine knowledge as the holy scriptures are. This our Saviour calls *taking away the key of knowledge, and shutting the kingdom of heaven against men*; that is, doing what in them lies to render it impossible for men to be saved. For this he denounceth a terrible wo against the teachers of the Jewish church; though they did not pro-

ceed so far as to deprive men of the use of the holy scriptures, but only of the right knowledge and understanding of them. This alone is a horrible impiety, to lead men into a false sense and interpretation of scripture; but much greater to forbid them the reading of it. This is to stop knowledge at the very fountain-head; and not only to lead men into error, but to take away from them all possibility of rectifying their mistakes. And can there be a greater sacrilege, than to rob men of the word of God, the best means in the world of acquainting them with the will of God and their duty, and the way to eternal happiness? To keep the people in ignorance of that which is necessary to save them, is *to judge them unworthy of eternal life*, and to declare it does not belong to them, and maliciously to contrive the eternal ruin and destruction of their souls.

To lock up the scriptures and the service of God from the people, in an unknown tongue, what is this, but in effect to forbid men to know God and to serve him; to render them incapable of knowing *what is the good and acceptable will of God*; of joining in his worship, or performing any part of it, or receiving any benefit or edification from it? And what is, if this be not, to shut the kingdom of heaven against men? This is so outrageous a cruelty to the souls of men, that it is not to be excused upon any pretence whatsoever: this is to take the surest and most effectual way in the world *to destroy those for whom Christ died*; and directly to thwart the great design of God our Saviour, *who would have all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth*. Men may miscarry with their knowledge; but they are sure to perish for want of it.

The best things in the world have their inconveniences attending them, and are liable to be abused; but surely men are not to be ruined and damned for fear of abusing their knowledge, or for the prevention of any other inconvenience whatsoever. Besides, this is to cross the very end of the scriptures, and the design of God in inspiring men to write them. Can any man think that God should send this great light of his word into the world, for the priests to *hide it under a bushel*; and not rather that it should be set up to the greatest advantage
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for the enlightening of the world? St Paul tells us, Rom. xv. 4. that *whatsoever things were written, were written for our learning, that we, through patience and comfort of the scriptures, might have hope*; and 2 Tim. iii. 16. that *all scripture is given by inspiration of God; and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness*. And if the scriptures were written for these ends, can any man have the face to pretend that they do not concern the people as well as their teachers? Nay, St Paul expressly tells the church of Rome, that they were written for their learning, however it happens now that they are not permitted to make use of them. Are the scriptures so useful and profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for instruction in righteousness? and why may they not be used by the people for those ends for which they were given? It is true indeed, they are fit for the most knowing and learned, and sufficient to make *the man of God perfect, and thoroughly furnished to every good work*, as the Apostle there tells us. But does this exclude their being profitable also to the people, who may reasonably be presumed to stand much more in need of all means and helps of instruction than their teachers? And though there be many difficulties and obscurities in the scriptures, enough to exercise the skill and wit of the learned; yet are they not therefore either useless or dangerous to the people. The ancient fathers of the church were of another mind. St Chrysostom tells us, that “*what-*”
“*ever things are necessary, are manifest in the scrip-*”
“*tures:*” and St Austin, “*that all things are plain*”
“*in the scripture, which concern faith and a good life;*”
“*and that those things which are necessary to the sal-*”
“*vation of men, are not so hard to be come at; but*”
“*that as to those things which the scripture plainly*”
“*contains, it speaks without disguise, like a familiar*”
“*friend, to the heart of the learned and unlearned.*”
And upon these and such like considerations, the fathers did every where, in their orations and homilies, charge and exhort the people to be conversant in the holy scriptures, to read them daily, and diligently, and attentively. And I challenge our adversaries to shew me where any of the ancient fathers do discourage the people

from reading the scriptures, much less forbid them so to do. So that they who do it now have no cloak for their sin: and they who pretend so confidently to antiquity in other cases, are by the evidence of truth forced to acknowledge that it is against them in this. Though they have ten thousand schoolmen on their side, yet have they not one father; not the least pretence of scripture, or rag of antiquity, to cover their nakedness in this point.

With great reason then does our Saviour denounce so heavy a wo against such teachers. Of old, in the like case, God, by his prophet, severely threatens the priests of the Jewish church, for not instructing the people in the knowledge of God, Hosea iv. 6. *My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee: thou shalt be no more a priest to me: seeing thou hast forgotten the law of thy God, I will also forget thy children.* God, you see, lays the ruin of so many souls at their doors, and will require their blood at their hands. So many as perish for want of knowledge, and eternally miscarry, by being deprived of the necessary means of salvation, their destruction shall be charged upon those who *have taken away the key of knowledge, and shut the kingdom of heaven against men.*

And it is just with God to punish such persons, not only as the occasion, but as the authors of their ruin. For who can judge otherwise, but that they who deprive men of the necessary means to any end, do purposely design to hinder them of attaining that end? And whatever may be pretended in this case, to deprive men of the holy scriptures, and to keep them ignorant of the service of God, and yet while they do so, to make a shew of an earnest desire of their salvation, is just such a mockery, as if one of you that is a master, should tell his apprentice, how much you desire he should thrive in the world, and be a rich man, but all the while keep him ignorant of his trade in order to his being rich; and, with the strictest care imaginable, conceal from him the best means of learning that whereby alone he is likely to thrive, and get an estate. *Wo unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites.*

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By what hath been discoursed upon this argument, you will easily perceive where the application is like to fall. For the wo denounced by our Saviour here in the text against the scribes and Pharisees, falls every whit as heavy upon the pastors and teachers of the Roman church. They have taken away the key of knowledge with a witness; not only depriving the people of the right understanding of the scriptures, but of the very use of them; as if they were so afraid they should understand them, that they dare not suffer them so much as to be acquainted with them.

This tyranny that church hath exercised over those of her communion for several hundreds of years. It grew upon them indeed by degrees; for as, by the inundation of barbarous nations upon the Roman empire, the Romans lost their language by degrees; so the governors of that church still kept up the scriptures, and the service of God, in the Latin tongue; which at last was wholly unknown to the common people. And about the ninth and tenth centuries, when, by the general consent of all their own historians, gross darknes and ignorance covered this part of the world, the Pope and the priests took away the key of knowledge, and did, as I may so say, put it under the door for several ages; till the reformation fetched it out again, and rubbed off the rust of it.

And I profess seriously, that hardly any thing in the world was ever to me more astonishing, than this uncharitable and cruel usage of the people in the church of Rome. And I cannot tell which to wonder at most; the insolence of their governors, in imposing upon men this senseless way of serving God; or the patience, shall I call it, or rather stupidity of the people, in enduring to be so intolerably abused. Why should reasonable creatures be treated at this rude and barbarous rate; as if they were unworthy to be acquainted with the will of God; and as if that which every man ought to do, were not fit for every man to know; as if the common people had only bodies to be present at the service of God, but no souls; or as if they were all distracted and out of their wits, and it were a dangerous thing to let in the light upon them?

But to speak more distinctly: There are two things
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we charge them withal, and which they are not able to deny; their performing the public service of God in an unknown tongue, and depriving the people of the use of the scriptures. And I shall first tell you what we have to say against these things, and then consider what they pretend for them.

1. As for their performing the service of God in a tongue unknown to the people. And I begin with St Paul; who, in his first epistle to the Corinthians, hath a whole chapter, on purpose to shew the unreasonableness of this thing, and how contrary it is to the edification of Christians. His discourse is so plain, and so well known, that I shall not particularly insist upon it. Erasmus, in his annotations upon this chapter, breaks out, as well he might, into admiration at the practice of the church of Rome in his time: *Hac in re mirum quàm mutata sit ecclesiæ consuetudo*: "It is wonderful (says he) how the custom of the church is altered in this matter." St Paul *had rather speak five words with understanding, and so as to teach others, than ten thousand in an unknown tongue*. Why does the church doubt to follow so great an authority? or rather how dares she to dissent from it?

As for the practice of the ancient church, let Origen bear witness. "The Grecians, (saith he), in their prayers, use the Greek, and the Romans the Latin tongue; and so every one according to his language prayeth unto God, and praiseth him as he is able."

And not only in Origen's time, but for more than the first six hundred years, the service of God was always performed in a known tongue. And this the learned men of their own church do not deny. And Cardinal Cajetan, as Cassander tells us, said, it was much better this custom were restored; and being reproved for saying so, he said he learned it from St Paul. And Bellarmine himself confesseth, that the Armenians, Egyptians, Æthiopians, Russians, and others, do use their own language in their liturgies at this day.

But it is otherwise now in the church of Rome, and hath been for several ages. And it seems they lay great stress upon it, not only as a thing of great use, but necessity. For Pope Gregory VII. forbids the Prince of Bohemia

Bohemia to permit to the people the celebration of divine offices in the Sclavonian tongue; and commands him to oppose them herein with all his forces. It seems he thought it a cause worthy the fighting for; and that it were much better the people should be killed, than suffered to understand their prayers.

But let us reason this matter a little calmly with them. Is it necessary for men to understand any thing they do in religion? and is not prayer one of the most solemn parts of religion? and why then should not men understand their prayers as well as any thing else they do in religion? Is it good that people should understand their private prayers? That (we thank them) they allow; and why not public as well? Is there less of religion in public prayers? is God less honoured by them? or are we not as capable of being edified, and of having our hearts and affections moved and excited by them? Where then lies the difference? The more I consider it, the more I am at a loss, what tolerable reason any man can give why people should not understand their public devotions as well as their private. If men cannot heartily and devoutly pray alone, without understanding what they ask of God, no more (say I) can they heartily and devoutly join in the public prayers which are made by the priest, without understanding what they are. If it be enough for the priest to understand them, why should not the priest only be present at them? unless the people do not meet to worship God, but only to wait upon the priest. But, by saying the priest understands them, it seems it is better some body should understand them than not; and why is not that which is good for the priest, good for the people?

So that the true state of the controversy is, Whether it be fit, that the people should be edified in the service of God? and whether it be fit the church should order things contrary to edification? For it is plain, that the service of God in an unknown tongue is useless and unprofitable to the people: nay, it is evidently no public service of God, when the priest only understands it. For how can they be said to be public prayers, if the people do not join in them? and how can they join in that they do not understand? and to what purpose

pose are lessons of scripture read, if people are to learn nothing by them? and how should they learn when they do not understand? This is as if one should pretend to teach a man Greek, by reading him lectures every day out of an Arabick and Persian book, of which he understands not one syllable.

3. As to their depriving the people of the use of the holy scriptures. Our blessed Saviour exhorts the Jews to *search the scriptures*; and St Paul chargeth the Christians, that *the word of God should dwell richly in them*: and the ancient fathers of the church do most frequently and earnestly recommend to the people the reading and study of the scriptures. How comes the case now to be so altered? Sure the word of God is not changed: that certainly abides and continues the same for ever.

I shall by and by examine what the church of Rome pretends in excuse of this sacrilege. In the mean time, I do not see what considerable objections can be made against the people's reading of the scriptures, which would not have held as well against the writing and publishing of them at first in a language understood by the people; as the Old Testament was by the Jews, and the epistles of the Apostles by the churches to whom they were written, and the gospels both by Jews and Greeks. Were there no difficulties and obscurities then in the scriptures capable of being wrested by the unstable and unlearned? were not people then liable to error? and was there no danger of heresy in those times? And yet these are their great objections against putting the scriptures into the hands of the people: which is just like their arguing against giving the cup to the laity, from the inconveniency of their beards, lest some of the consecrated wine should be spilt upon them; as if errors and beards were inconveniencies lately sprung up in the world, and which mankind were not liable to in the first ages of Christianity.

But, if there were the same dangers and inconveniencies in all ages, this reason makes against the publishing of the scriptures to the people at first, as much as against permitting them the use of them now. And in truth all these objections are against the scripture itself. And that which the church of Rome would find fault with,

with, if they durst, is, that there should be any such book in the world, and that it should be in any body's hands, learned or unlearned; for, if it be dangerous to any, none are so capable of doing mischief with it as men of wit and learning. So that, at the bottom, if they would speak out, the quarrel is against the scriptures themselves. This is too evident by the counsel given to Pope Julius III. by the bishops met at Bononia, to consult about the establishment of the Roman see; where, among other things, they gave this as their last advice, and as the greatest and weightiest of all, "That by all means as little of the gospel as might be, especially in the vulgar tongue, should be read to the people; and that little which was in the mass ought to be sufficient: neither should it be permitted to any mortal to read more. For so long (say they) as men were contented with that little, all things went well with them; but quite otherwise, since more was commonly read." And speaking of the scripture, they give this remarkable testimony and commendation of it. "This, in short, is that book, which, above all others, hath raised those tempests and whirlwinds which we were almost carried away with. And, in truth, if any one diligently considers it, and compares it with what is done in our church, he will find them very contrary to each other; and our doctrine not only to be very different from it, but repugnant to it." If this be the case, they do like the rest of the children of this world, prudently enough in their generation. Can we blame them for being against the scriptures, when the scriptures are acknowledged to be so clearly against them? But surely no body that considereth these things would be of that church, which is brought by the undeniable evidence of the things themselves to this shameful confession, that several of their doctrines and practices are very contrary to the word of God.

Much more might have been said against the practice of the church of Rome in these two particulars; but this is sufficient.

I shall, in the second place, consider what is pretended for them. And indeed what can be pretended in justification of so contumelious an affront to mankind, so great

great a tyranny and cruelty to the souls of men? Hath God forbidden the people to look into the scriptures? No: quite contrary. Was it the practice of the ancient church to lay this restraint upon men, or to celebrate the service of God in an unknown tongue? Our adversaries themselves have not the face to pretend this. I shall truly represent the substance of what they say in these two points.

1. As to the service of God in an unknown tongue, they say these four things for themselves.

1st, That the people do exercise a general devotion, and come with an intention to serve God; and that is accepted, though they do not particularly understand the prayers that are made, and the lessons that are read.

But is this all that is intended in the service of God? Does not St Paul expressly require more? that the understanding of the people should be edified by the particular service that is performed? And if what is done be not particularly understood, he tells us the people are not edified, nor can say *Amen* to the prayers and thanksgivings that are put up to God; and that any man that should come in and find people serving of God in this unprofitable and unreasonable manner, would conclude that they were mad.

And if there be any general devotion in the people, it is because in general they understand what they are about; and why may they not as well understand the particular service that is performed, that so they might exercise a particular devotion? So that they are devout no farther than they understand; and consequently, as to what they do not understand, had every whit as good be absent.

2^{dly}, They say, the prayers are to God, and he understands them; and that is enough. But what harm were it, if all they that pray understood them also? or indeed how can men pray to God without understanding what they ask of him? Is not prayer a part of the Christian worship? and is not that a reasonable service? and is any service reasonable that is not directed by our understandings, and accompanied with our hearts and affections?

But then what say they to the lessons and exhortations

tions of scripture, which are likewise read to the people in an unknown tongue? Are these directed to God, or to the people only? and are they not designed by God for their instruction? and read either to that purpose or to none? and is it possible to instruct men by what they do not understand? This is a new and wonderful way of teaching, by concealing from the people the things which they should learn. Is it not all one, as to all purposes of edification, as if the scriptures were not read, or any thing else in the place of them? as they many times do their legends, which the wiser sort among them do not believe when they read them. For all things are alike to them that understand none; as all things are of a colour in the dark. Ignorance knows no difference of things; it is only knowledge that can distinguish.

3dly, They say, that some do, at least in some measure, understand the particular prayers. If they do, that is no thanks to them. It is by accident if they are more knowing than the rest; and more than the church either desires or intends: for if they desired it, they might order their service so as every man might understand it.

4thly, They say, that it is convenient that God should be served and worshipped in the same language all the world over. Convenient for whom? for God? or for the people? Not for God, surely: for he understands all other languages as well as Latin; and, for any thing we know to the contrary, likes them as well. And certainly it cannot be so convenient for the people; because they generally understand no language but their own; and it is very inconvenient they should not understand what they do in the service of God. But perhaps they mean, that it is convenient for the Roman church to have it so; because this will look like an argument that they are the catholic or universal church, when the language which was originally theirs, shall be the universal language in which all nations shall serve God. And by this means also they may bring all nations to be of their religion, and yet make them never the wiser: and this is a very great convenience; because knowledge is a troublesome thing, and ignorance very quiet and peaceable,

peaceable, rendering men fit to be governed, and unfit to dispute.

2. As to their depriving the people of the scriptures, the sum of what they say may be reduced to these three heads.

1st, That the church can give leave to men to read the scriptures. But this not without great trouble and difficulty. There must be a licence for it under the hand of the bishop or inquisitor, by the advice of the priest or confessor, concerning the fitness of the person that desires this privilege: and we may be sure they will think none fit, but those of whom they have the greatest confidence and security. And whoever presumes to do it otherwise, is to be denied absolution; which is, as much as in them lies, to damn men for presuming to read the word of God without their leave.

And whatever they may allow here in England, where they hold their people upon more slippery terms; yet this privilege is very rarely granted where they are in full possession of their power, and have the people perfectly under their yoke.

2^{dly}, They tell us, they instruct the people otherwise. This indeed were something, if they did it to purpose; but generally they do it very sparingly and slightly. Their sermons are commonly made up of feigned stories and miracles of saints, and exhortations to the worship of them, and especially of the blessed Virgin, and of their images and relicks. And for the truth of this I appeal to the innumerable volumes of their sermons and postils in print; which I suppose are none of their worst. I am sure Erasmus says, that, in his time, in several countries, the people did scarce once in half a year hear a profitable sermon to exhort them to true piety. Indeed they allow the people some catechisms and manuals of devotion; and yet in many of them they have the conscience and the confidence to steal away the second commandment in the face of the eighth.

But, to bring the matter to a point, if those helps of instruction are agreeable to the scriptures, why are they so afraid the people should read the scriptures? If they are not, why do they deceive and delude them?

3^{dly}, They say, that people are apt to wrest the scriptures

tures to their own destruction ; and that the promiscuous use of them hath been the great occasion of heresies. It cannot be denied to be the condition of the very best things in the world, that they are liable to be abused : health, and light, and liberty, as well as knowledge. But must all these be therefore taken away ? This very inconvenience, of people's wresting the scriptures to their own ruin, St Peter takes notice of in his days ; but he does not therefore forbid men the reading of them, as his more prudent successors have done since. Suppose the reading of the scriptures hath been the occasion of heresies, were there ever more than in the first ages of Christianity ? And yet neither the apostles nor their successors ever prescribed this remedy. But are they in earnest ? Must not men know the truth for fear of falling into error ? Because men may possibly miss their way at noon-day, must they never travel but in the night, when they are sure to lose it ?

And, when all is done, this is not true, that heresies have sprung from this cause. They have generally been broached by the learned, from whom the scriptures neither were, nor could be concealed. And for this I appeal to the history and experience of all ages. I am well assured the ancient fathers were of another mind. St Chrysostom says, “ If men would be conversant in the scriptures, and attend to them, they would not only not fall into errors themselves, but rescue those that are deceived ; and that the scriptures would instruct men both in right opinions and a good life.” And St Hierome, more expressly to our purpose, That “ infinite evils arise from the ignorance of the scriptures ; and that from that cause the most part of heresies have come.”

But, if what they say were true, is not this to lay the blame of all the ancient heresies upon the ill-management of things by our Saviour and his apostles, and the holy fathers of the church for so many ages, and their imprudent dispensing of the scriptures to the people ? This indeed is to charge the matter home ; and yet this consequence is unavoidable. For the church of Rome cannot justify the piety and prudence of their present practices, without accusing all these.

But the thing which they mainly rely upon as to both these practices, is this, That though these things were otherwise in the apostles times, and in the ancient church, yet the church hath power to alter them, according to the exigence and circumstances of time. I have purposely reserved this for the last place, because it is their last refuge; and if this fail them, they are gone.

To shew the weakness of this pretence, we will, if they please, take it for granted, that the governors of the church have in no age more power than the apostles had in theirs. Now, St Paul tells us, 2 Cor. x. 8. that the authority which the apostles had given them from the Lord, was only *for edification, but not for destruction*. And the same St Paul makes it the business of a whole chapter to shew, that the performing the public service of God, and particularly praying, in an unknown tongue, are contrary to edification: from which premises the conclusion is plain, that the apostles themselves had no authority to appoint the service of God to be performed in an unknown tongue. And surely it is arrogance for the church in any age to pretend greater authority than the apostles had.

This is the sum of what our adversaries say in justification of themselves in these points. And there is no doubt but that men of wit and confidence will always make a shift to say something for any thing; and some way or other blanch over the blackest and most absurd things in the world. But I leave it to the judgement of mankind, whether any thing be more unreasonable, than to tell men, in effect, that it is fit they should understand as little of religion as is possible; that God hath published a very dangerous book, with which it is not safe for the people to be familiarly acquainted; that our blessed Saviour and his apostles, and the ancient Christian church, for more than six hundred years, were not wise managers of religion, nor prudent dispensers of the scriptures; but, like fond and foolish fathers, put a knife and a sword into the hands of their children, with which they might easily have foreseen what mischief they would do to themselves and others. And who would not chuse to be of such a church, which is provided of such excellent and effectual means of ignorance,

rance, such wise and infallible methods for the prevention of knowledge in the people, and such variety of close shutters to keep out the light?

I have chosen to insist upon this argument, because it is so very plain, that the most ordinary capacity may judge of this usage and dealing with the souls of men; which is so very gross, that every man must needs be sensible of it; because it toucheth men in the common rights of human nature, which belong to them as much as the light of heaven, and the air we breathe in.

It requires no subtilty of wit, no skill in antiquity, to understand these controversies between us and the church of Rome. For there are no fathers to be pretended on both sides in these questions: they yield we have antiquity on ours; and we refer it to the common sense of mankind, which church, that of Rome or ours, hath all the right and reason in the world on her side in these debates? and who they are that tyrannize over Christians, the governors of their church or ours? who use the people like sons and freemen, and who like slaves? who feed the flock of Christ committed to them, and who take the childrens bread from them? who they are that, when their children ask bread, for bread give them a stone, and for an egg, a serpent; I mean the legends of their saints, instead of the holy scriptures, *which are able to make men wise unto salvation?* and who they are that lie most justly under the suspicion of errors and corruptions; they who bring their doctrine and practices into the open light, and are willing to have them tried by the true touch-stone, the word of God; or they who shun the light, and decline all manner of trial and examination? and who are most likely to carry on a worldly design; they who drive a trade of such mighty gain and advantage under pretence of religion, and make such markets of the ignorance and sins of the people; or we whom malice itself cannot charge with serving any worldly design, by any allowed doctrine or practice of our religion? for we make no money of the mistakes of the people; nor do we fill their heads with vain fears of new places of torment, to make them willing to empty their purses in a vainer hope of being delivered out of them. We do not, like them, pretend a mighty bank and treasure of merits in

the church, which they sell to the people for ready money, giving them bills of exchange from the Pope to purgatory; when they who grant them have no reason to believe they will avail them, or be accepted in the other world.

For our parts, we have no fear that our people should understand religion too well: we could wish, with Moses, *that all the Lord's people were prophets*: we should be heartily glad the people would read the holy scriptures more diligently, being sufficiently assured, that it is their own fault if they learn any thing but what is good from thence: we have no doctrines or practices contrary to scripture, and consequently no occasion to keep it close from the sight of the people, or to hide any of the commandments of God from them: we leave these mean arts to those who stand in need of them.

In a word, there is nothing which God hath said to men, which we desire should be concealed from them: nay, we are willing the people should examine what we teach, and bring all our doctrines *to the law and to the testimony*; that, if they be not according to this rule, they may neither believe them nor us. It is only things false and adulterate, which shun the light and fear the touchstone. We have that security of the truth of our religion, and of the agreeableness of it to the word of God, that honest confidence of the goodness of our cause, that we do not forbid the people to read the best books our adversaries can write against it.

And now let any impartial man judge, whether this be not a better argument of a good cause, to leave men at liberty to try the grounds of their religion, than the courses which are taken in the church of Rome, to awe men with an inquisition; and, as much as is possible, to keep the common people in ignorance, not only of what their late adversaries, the Protestants, but their chief and ancient adversary, the scriptures, have to say against them.

A man had need of more than common security of the skill and integrity of those to whom he perfectly resigns his understanding. This is too great a trust to be reposed in human frailty, and too strong a temptation to others to impose upon us, to abuse our blindness, and to make their own ends of our voluntary ignorance and easy credulity.

dulity. This is such a folly, as if a rich man should make his physician his heir; which is to tempt him either to destroy him, or to let him die, for his own interest. So he that trusts the care of his soul with other men, and at the same time by irrevocable deed settles his understanding upon them, lays too great a temptation before them to seduce and damn him for their own ends.

And now to reflect a little upon ourselves: What cause have we to bless God, who are so happily rescued from that more than Egyptian darkness and bondage, wherein this nation was detained for several ages! who are delivered out of the hands of those cruel taskmasters, who required brick without straw; that men should be religious without competent understanding, and work out their own salvation, while they denied them the means of all others the most necessary to it; who are so uncharitable as to allow us no salvation out of their church, and yet so unreasonable as to deny us the very best means of salvation when we are in it.

Our forefathers thought it a mighty privilege to have the word of God restored to them, and the public prayers and service of God celebrated in a known tongue. Let us use this inestimable privilege with great modesty and humility; not to the nourishing of pride and self-conceit, of division and faction; but, as the Apostle exhorts, *Let the word of God dwell richly in you, in all wisdom; and let the peace of God rule in your hearts, unto which ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful.*

It concerns us mightily, with which admonition I shall conclude, both for the honour and support of our religion, to be at better union among ourselves, and not to divide about lesser things; and so to demean ourselves, as to take from our adversaries all those pretences whereby they would justify themselves, or at least extenuate the guilt of that heavy charge, which falls every whit as justly upon them as ever it did upon the scribes and Pharisees, of *taking away the key of knowledge, and shutting the kingdom of heaven against men: neither going in themselves, nor suffering those that are entering, to go in.*

S E R M O N XXXI.

The parable of the ten virgins.

Preached before her Royal Highness the Princess Anne of Denmark, at Tunbridge-wells, Sept. 2. 1688.

MATTH. XXV. 1. 2. &c.

Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom.

And five of them were wise, and five were foolish, &c.

MY design at present is, to explain this parable, and to make such observations upon it as seem most naturally, and without squeezing the parable, to spring from it; and then to make some application of it to ourselves.

Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins: by the *kingdom of heaven* is meant the state and condition of things under the gospel; by the *ten virgins*, those who embraced the profession of it; which is here represented by their *taking their lamps, and going forth to meet the bridegroom*; in allusion to the ancient custom of marriages, in which the bridegroom was wont to lead home his bride in the night by the light of lamps or torches.

But this profession was not in all equally firm and fruitful: and therefore those who persevered and continued stedfast in this profession, notwithstanding all the temptations and allurements of the world, and all the fierce storms and assaults of persecution to which this profession was exposed, and being thus firmly rooted in it, did bring forth the fruits of the Spirit, and abound in the graces and virtues of a good life; these are the *wise virgins*: but those who either deserted this profes-

sion,

sion, or did not bring forth fruits answerable to it, are the *foolish virgins*.

And that this is the true difference between them, will appear, if we consider how the parable represents them, ver. 3. 4. *They that were foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them; but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps;* so that they both took their lamps, and both lighted them, and therefore must both be supposed to have some oil in their lamps at first; as appears from ver. 8.; where *the foolish virgins said unto the wise, Give us of your oil, for our lamps are gone out.* They had, it seems, some oil in their lamps at first, which kept them lighted for a little while, but had taken no care for a future supply. And therefore the difference between the wise and foolish virgins did not, as some have imagined, consist in this, that the wise virgins had oil, but the foolish had none; but in this, that the foolish had taken no care for a farther supply, after the oil that was at first put into their lamps was spent, as the wise had done; who, besides the oil that was in their lamps, carried likewise a reserve in some other vessel, for a continual supply of the lamp, as there should be occasion; *the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps.*

Now, the meaning of all this is, that they who are represented by the *wise virgins*, had not only embraced the profession of the Christian religion, as the *foolish virgins* also had done, for they both had their lamps lighted, but they likewise persevered in that profession, and brought forth fruits answerable to it. For by *oil in their lamps*, and the first lighting of them, which was common to them both, is meant that solemn profession of faith and repentance which all Christians make in baptism: by that further supply of oil, which the wise virgins only took care to provide, is signified our constancy and perseverance in this profession, together with the fruits of the spirit, and the improvement of the grace received in baptism by the practice and exercise of all the graces and virtues of a good life, whereby men are fitted and prepared for death and judgement; which are here represented to us by the *coming of the bridegroom*.

This being plainly the main scope and intention of the parable, I shall explain the rest of it, as there shall be

be occasion, under the several observations which I shall raise from the several parts of it. And they shall be these.

1. I observe the charitable decorum which our blessed Saviour keeps in this, as well as in the rest of his parables; as if he would fain suppose and hope, that among those who enjoy the gospel, and make profession of it, the number of them are truly good, is equal to those that are bad. For our blessed Saviour here represents the whole number of the professors of Christianity by *ten virgins*, the half whereof the parable seems to suppose to be truly and really good, and to persevere in goodness to the end, ver. 1. 2. *Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom. And five of them were wise, and five were foolish.*

2. I observe how very common it is for men to neglect this great concernment of their souls, viz. a due preparation for another world; and how willing men are to deceive themselves herein, and to depend upon any thing else, how groundless and unreasonable soever, rather than to take pains to be really good, and fit for heaven. And this is in a very lively manner represented to us in the description of the foolish virgins, who had provided no supply of oil in their vessels, and when the bridegroom was coming, would have furnished themselves by borrowing or buying of others, ver. 8. 9. 10.

3. I observe, that even the better sort of Christians are not careful and watchful as they ought, to prepare themselves for death and judgement: *Whilst the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept*; even the wise virgins as well as the foolish.

4. I observe further, how little is to be done by us, to any good purpose, in this great work of preparation, when it is deferred and put off to the last. Thus the foolish virgins did; and what a sad confusion and hurry they were in, we may see, ver. 6. 7. 8. 9. *And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh, go ye out to meet him. At midnight*; the most dismal and unseasonable time of all other. *Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said unto the wise, Give us of your oil, for our lamps are gone out. But*

But the wise answered, Not so; lest there be not enough for us and you: but go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves. And how ineffectual all that they could do at that time proved to be, we find, ver. 10. 11. 12. And whilst they went to buy, the bridegroom came, and they that were ready, went in with him to the marriage, and the door was shut. Afterwards came also the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us. But he answered and said, Verily I say unto you, I know you not.

5. I observe, that there is no such thing as works of supererogation; that no man can do more than needs, and is his duty to do, by way of preparation for another world. For when the foolish virgins would have begged of the wise some oil for their lamps, the wise answered, *Not so; lest there be not enough for us and you.* It was only the foolish virgins that had entertained this foolish conceit, that there might be an overplus of grace and merit in others sufficient to supply their want: but the wise knew not of any that they had to spare, but supposed all that they had little enough to qualify them for the reward of eternal life: *Not so*, say they, μήποτε, *lest at any time*, lest when there should be need and occasion, all that we have done, or could do, should prove little enough for ourselves.

6. And lastly, I observe, that if we could suppose any persons to be so over-good, as to have more grace and goodness than needs to qualify them for the reward of eternal life; yet there is no assigning and transferring of this overplus of grace and virtue from one man to another. For we see, ver. 9. 10. that all the ways which they could think of, of borrowing or buying oil of others, did all prove ineffectual; because the thing is in its own nature impracticable, that one sinner should be in a condition to merit for another.

All these observations seem to have some fair and probable foundation in some part or other of this parable; and most of them, I am sure, are agreeable to the main scope and intention of the whole. I shall speak to them severally, and as briefly as I can.

I. I observe the charitable decorum which our blessed Saviour keeps in this, as well as in the rest of his parables; as if he would fain suppose and hope, that among those

those who enjoy the gospel, and make profession of it, the number of those who make a firm and sincere profession of it, and persevere in goodness to the end, is equal to the number of those who do not make good their profession, or who fall off from it.

I shall not be long upon this, because I lay the least stress upon it of all the rest. I shall only take notice, that our blessed Saviour, in this parable, represents the whole number of the professors of Christianity by *ten virgins*, the half of which the parable seems to suppose to have sincerely embraced the Christian profession, and to have persevered therein to the last: *The kingdom of heaven shall be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom. And five of them were wise, and five were foolish.*

And this decorum our blessed Saviour seems carefully to observe in his other parables; as in the parable of the prodigal, Luke xv.; where, for one son that left his father, and took riotous courses, there was another that staid always with him, and continued constant to his duty. And in the parable of the ten talents, which immediately follows that of the ten virgins, two are supposed to improve the talents committed to them, for one that made no improvement of his. He that had five talents committed to him, made them five more; and he that had two, gained other two; and only he that had but one talent, *hid it in the earth*, and made no improvement of it. And in the parable which I am now upon, the number of the professors of Christianity who took care to fit and prepare themselves for the *coming of the bridegroom*, is supposed equal to the number of those who did not.

And whether this be particularly intended in the parable or not, it may however be thus far instructive to us, that we should be so far from lessening the number of true Christians, and from confining the church of Christ within a narrow compass, so as to exclude out of its communion the far greatest part of the professors of Christianity; that, on the contrary, we should enlarge the kingdom of Christ as much as we can, and extend our charity to all churches and Christians, of what denomination soever, as far as regard to truth, and to the foundations

foundations of the Christian religion, will permit us to believe and hope well of them; and rather be contented to err a little on the favourable and charitable part, than to be mistaken on the censorious and damning side.

And for this reason perhaps it is, that our blessed Saviour thought fit to frame his parables with so remarkable a bias to the charitable side; partly to instruct us to extend our charity towards all Christian churches, and professors of the Christian religion, and our good hopes concerning them, as far as with reason we can; and partly to reprove the uncharitableness of the Jews, who positively excluded all the rest of mankind, besides themselves, from all hopes of salvation: An odious temper, which, to the infinite scandal of the Christian name and profession, hath prevailed upon some Christians to that notorious degree, as not only to shut out all the reformed part of the Western church, almost equal in number to themselves, from all hopes of salvation, under the notion of heretics; but likewise to unchurch all the other churches of the Christian world, which are of much greater extent and number than themselves, that do not own subjection to the Bishop of Rome. And this they do, by declaring it to be of necessity to salvation for every creature to be subject to the Roman Bishop. And this supremacy of the Bishop of Rome over all Christian churches, Bellarmine calls the sum of the Christian religion. So that the Roman communion is plainly founded in schism; that is, in the most unchristian and uncharitable principle that can be, namely, That they are the only true church of Christ, out of which none can be saved: which was the very schism of the Donatists. And in this they are so positive, that the learned men of that church, in their disputes and writings, are much more inclinable to believe the salvation of Heathens to be possible, than of any of those Christians whom they are pleased to call heretics. The faith of the church of Rome is certainly none of the best: but of one of the greatest and most essential virtues of the Christian religion, I mean charity, I doubt they have the least share of any Christian church this day in the world.

II. I observe, not from any particular circumstance, but from the main-scope and design of this parable, how

very apt a great part of Christians are to neglect this great concernment of their souls, *viz.* a careful and due preparation for another world; and how willing they are to deceive themselves in this matter, and to depend upon any thing else, how groundless and unreasonable soever, rather than to take the pains to be really good, and fit for heaven. And this is in a very lively manner represented to us in the description of the foolish virgins; who had provided no supply of oil in their vessels, and, when the bridegroom was coming, would have furnished themselves by borrowing or buying of others, ver. 8. 9. 10. They contented themselves with having their lamps lighted at their first setting out to meet the bridegroom; that is, with their being admitted into the profession of Christianity by baptism; but either were not steadfast in this profession, or were not careful to adorn it with the graces and virtues of a good life.

And the true reason why men are so very apt to deceive themselves in this matter, and are so hardly brought to those things wherein religion mainly consists, I mean the fruits of the spirit, and the practice of real goodness; I say, the true reason of this is, because they are extremely desirous to reconcile, if it were possible, the hopes of eternal happiness in another world, with a liberty to live as they list in this present world: they are loth to be at the trouble and drudgery of mortifying their lusts, and governing their passions, and bridling their tongues, and practising all those duties which are comprehended in those two great commandments, of the love of God, and of our neighbour: they would fain gain the favour of God, and make their calling and election sure, by some easier way, than by giving all diligence to add to their faith and knowledge the graces and virtues of a good life.

For the plain truth of the matter is, men had rather that religion should be any thing than what indeed it is, *viz.* the thwarting and crossing of their vitious inclinations, the curing of their evil and corrupt affections, the due care and government of their unruly appetites and passions, the sincere endeavour and the constant practice of all holiness and virtue in their lives; and therefore they had much rather have something that might handsomely

somely palliate and excuse their evil inclinations and practices, than to be obliged to retrench and renounce them; and rather than amend and reform their wicked lives, they would be contented to make an honourable amends and compensation to almighty God in some other way.

This hath been the way and folly of mankind in all ages, to defeat the great end and design of religion, and to thrust it by, by substituting something else in the place of it, which, as they think, may serve the turn as well, having the appearance of as much devotion, and respect towards God, and really costing them more money and pains, than that which God requires of them. Men have ever been apt thus to impose upon themselves, and to please themselves with a conceit of pleasing God full as well, or better, by some other way than that which he hath prescribed and appointed for them.

By this means, and upon this false principle, religion hath ever been apt to degenerate, both among Jews and Christians, into external and little observances, and into a great zeal for lesser things, with a total neglect of the greater and weightier matters of religion; and, in a word, into infinite superstitions of one kind or other, and an arrogant conceit of the extraordinary righteousness and merit of these things: in which some have proceeded to that height, as if they could drive a strict bargain with God for eternal life and happiness; and have treated him in so insolent a manner, by their doctrine of the merit of their devotions and good works, as if God were as much beholden to them for their service and obedience, as they are to him for the reward of them; which they are not afraid to say, they may challenge at God's hand, as of right and justice belonging to them.

Nay, so far have they carried this doctrine in the church of Rome, as not only to pretend to merit eternal life for themselves, but likewise to do a great deal more, for the benefit and advantage of others who have not righteousness and goodness enough of their own: which was the silly conceit of the foolish virgins here in the parable; as I shall have occasion to shew more fully by and by.

And it is no great wonder, that such easy ways of religion

ligion and pleasing God are very grateful to the corrupt nature of men ; and that men who are resolved to continue in an evil course, are glad to be of a church which will assure salvation to men upon such terms. The great difficulty is, for men to believe that things which are so apparently absurd and unreasonable can be true ; and to persuade themselves, that they can impose upon God by such pretences of service and obedience, as no wise prince or father upon earth is to be deluded withal by his subjects or children. We ought to have worthier thoughts of God, and to consider that he is a *great King*, and will be obeyed and served by his creatures in his own way, and make them happy upon his own terms ; and that obedience to what he commands, is better, and more acceptable to him, than any other sacrifice that we can offer, which he hath not required at our hands ; and likewise that he is infinitely wise and good ; and therefore that the laws which he hath given us to live by, are much more likely and certain means of our happiness, than any inventions or devices of our own.

III. I observe, that even the better and more considerate sort of Christians are not so careful and watchful as they ought, to prepare themselves for death and judgement : *Whilst the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept.* Even the disciples of our Saviour, whilst he was yet personally present with them, and after a particular charge given them from his own mouth, *Watch and pray, lest ye enter into temptation ;* yet did not keep that guard upon themselves, as to *watch with him for one hour.* In many things, says St James, *we offend all ;* even the best of us. And who is there that doth not, some time or other, remit of his vigilancy and care, so as to give the devil an advantage, and to lie open to temptation, for want of a continual guard upon himself ? But then, the difference between the wise and foolish virgins was this, that though they both slept, yet the wise did not let their lamps go out ; they neither quitted their profession, nor did they extinguish it by a bad life : and though, when the bridegroom came suddenly upon them, they were not so actually prepared to meet him by a continual vigilancy ; yet they were habitually prepared by the good disposition of their minds, and the general course

course of a holy life: their lamps might burn dim for want of continual trimming; but they had oil in their vessels to supply their lamps, which the foolish virgins had taken no care to provide. But, surely, the greatest wisdom of all is, to maintain a continual watchfulness, that so we may not be surprised by the coming of the bridegroom, and be in a confusion when death or judgement shall overtake us. And blessed are those servants, and wise indeed, whose lamps always burn bright, and whom the bridegroom when he comes shall find watching, and in a fit posture and preparation to meet him.

IV. I observe likewise, how little is to be done by us, to any good purpose, in this great work of preparation, when it is deferred and put off to the last. And thus the foolish virgins did: but what a sad confusion and hurry they were in at the sudden coming of the bridegroom, when they were not only asleep, but when, after they were awakened, they found themselves altogether unprovided of that which was necessary to trim their lamps, and to put them in a posture to meet the bridegroom; when they wanted that which was necessary at that very instant, but could not be provided in an instant; I say, what a tumult and confusion they were in, being thus surprised, the parable represents to us at large, ver. 6. 7. 8. 9. *And at midnight, there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh, go ye out to meet him. Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps; that is, they went about it as well as they could. And the foolish said unto the wise, Give us of your oil, for our lamps are gone out.*

At midnight there was a cry made; that is, at the most dismal and unseasonable time of all other; when they were fast asleep, and suddenly awakened in great terror; when they could not on the sudden recollect themselves, and consider what to do; when the summons was so very short, that they had neither time to consider what was fit to be done, nor time to do it in.

And such is the case of those who put off their repentance, and preparation for another world, till they are surprised by death or judgement; for it comes all to one in the issue, which of them it be. The parable indeed seems more particularly to point at our Lord's coming

to judgement: but the case is much the same as to those who are surprised by sudden death; such as gives them but little, or not sufficient time for so great a work; because such as death leaves them, judgement will certainly find them.

And what a miserable confusion must they needs be in, who are thus surprised, either by the one or the other? How unfit should we be, if the general judgement of the world should come upon us on the sudden, to meet that great judge at his coming, if we have made no preparation for it before that time? What shall we then be able to do in that great and universal consternation; when *the Son of man shall appear in the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory: when the sun shall be darkened, and the moon turned into blood, and all the powers of heaven shall be shaken; when all nature shall feel such violent pangs and convulsions, and the whole world shall be in a combustion, flaming, and cracking about our ears; when the heavens shall be shrivelled up as a scroll, when it is rolled together, and the earth shall be tossed from its centre, and every mountain and island shall be removed?* What thoughts can the wisest men then have about them, in the midst of so much noise and terror? or, if they could have any, what time will there then be to put them in execution? when they shall see the *angel that standeth upon the sea, and upon the earth, lifting up his hand to heaven, and swearing by him that liveth for ever and ever, that time shall be no longer; as this dreadful day is described Rev. x. 5. 6. and chap. vi. 15.; where sinners are represented, at the appearance of this great judge, not as flying to God in hopes of mercy, but as flying from him in utter despair of finding mercy with him. The kings of the earth, and the great men, and the mighty men, and the rich men, and the great captains, hid themselves in the dens, and in the rocks of the earth; and said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the lamb: for the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?* The biggest and the boldest sinners that ever were upon earth, shall then flee from the face of him whom they have so often blasphemed and denied; and shall so far despair of find-
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ing mercy with him in that day, who would sue to him for it no sooner, that they shall address themselves to the mountains and rocks, as being more pitiful and exorable than he, *to hide them from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: from the wrath of the Lamb*, to signify unto us, that nothing is more terrible than meekness and patience, when they are thoroughly provoked, and turned into fury.

In such dreadful confusion shall all impenitent sinners be, when they shall be surpris'd by that great and terrible day of the Lord: and the case of a dying sinner, who would take no care in the time of his life and health to make preparation for another world, is not much more hopeful and comfortable.

For, alas! how little is it that a sick and dying man can do in such a strait of time; in the midst of so much pain and weakness of body, and of such confusion and amazement of mind? With what heart can he set about so great a work, for which there is so little time? with what face can he apply himself to God in this extremity, whom he hath so disdainfully neglected all the days of his life? and how can he have the confidence to hope that God will hear his cries, and regard his tears, that are forced from him in this day of his necessity; when he is conscious to himself, that, in that long day of God's grace and patience, he turned a deaf ear to all his merciful invitations, and *rejected the counsel of God against himself*? In a word, how can he, who would not know, in that his day, the things which belonged to his peace, expect any other, but that they should now be for ever *hid from his eyes*, which are ready to be closed in utter darkness?

I will not pronounce any thing concerning the impossibility of a deathbed repentance: but I am sure that it is very difficult, and I believe very rare. We have but one example, that I know of, in the whole Bible, of the repentance of a dying sinner; I mean that of the penitent thief upon the cross: and the circumstances of his case are so peculiar and extraordinary, that I cannot see that it affords any ground of hope and encouragement to men in ordinary cases. We are not like to suffer in the company of the Son of God, and of the Sa-
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viour of the world : and if we could do so, it is not certain that we should behave ourselves towards him so well as the penitent thief did, and make so very good an end of so very bad a life.

And the parable in the text is so far from giving any encouragement to a deathbed-repentance and preparation, that it rather represents their case as desperate, who put off their preparation to that time. How ineffectual all that the foolish virgins could do at that time did in the conclusion prove, is set forth to us at large in the parable. They wanted oil ; but could neither borrow nor buy it, ver. 8. 9. 10. 11. 12. They would then fain have had it, and ran about to get it ; but it was not to be obtained neither by intreaty nor for money. First, they apply themselves to the wise virgins, for a share in the overplus of their graces and virtues : ver. 8. *The foolish said unto the wise, Give us of your oil, for our lamps are gone out. But the wise answered, Not so ; lest there be not enough for us and you.* The wise virgins, it seems, knew of none they had to spare. And then they are represented as ironically sending the foolish virgins to some famous market where this oil was pretended to be sold ; ver. 9. *Go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves.* And as dying and desperate persons are apt to catch at every twig, and when they can see no hopes of being saved, are apt to believe every one that will give them any ; so these foolish virgins follow the advice : ver. 10. *And whilst they went to buy, the bridegroom came, and they that were ready, went in with him to the marriage, and the door was shut. And afterwards came also the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us. But he answered and said, Verily I say unto you, I know you not.*

You see how little, or rather no encouragement at all, there is from any the least circumstance in this parable, for those who have delayed their preparation for another world, till they be overtaken by death or judgement, to hope by any thing that they can then do, by any importunity which they can then use, to gain admission into heaven. Let those consider this with fear and trembling, who forget God, and neglect religion all their lifetime, and yet feed themselves with vain hopes,
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by some device or other, to be admitted into heaven at last.

V. I observe, that there is no such thing as works of supererogation; that is, that no man can do more than needs, and than is his duty to do, by way of preparation for another world: for when the foolish virgins would have begged of the wise some oil for their lamps, ver. 8. the wise answered, ver. 9. *Not so; lest there be not enough for us and you.* It was only the foolish virgins that, in the time of their extremity, and when they were conscious that they wanted that which was absolutely necessary to qualify them for admission into heaven, who had entertained this idle conceit, that there might be an overplus of grace and merit in others sufficient to supply their want. But the wise knew not of any they had to spare; but supposed all that they had done, or could possibly do, to be little enough to qualify them for the glorious reward of eternal life: *Not so, (say they); μήποτε, lest at any time;* that is, lest when there should be need and occasion, all that we have done, or could do, should be little enough for ourselves. And in this point they had been plainly instructed by the bridegroom himself: *But ye, when ye have done all, say, We are unprofitable servants; and have done nothing but what was our duty to do.*

And yet this conceit of the foolish virgins, as absurd as it is, hath been taken up in good earnest by a grave matron, who gives out herself to be the mother and mistress of all churches, and the only infallible oracle of truth: I mean the church of Rome, whose avowed doctrine it is, That there are some persons so excellently good, that they may do more than needs for their own salvation: and therefore, when they have done as much for themselves as in strict duty they are bound to do, and thereby have paid down a full and valuable consideration for heaven, and as much as in equal justice between God and man it is worth, that then they may go to work again for their friends, and begin a new score; and from that time forward, may put the surplussage of their good works as a debt upon God, to be laid up in the public treasury of the church, as so many bills of credit, which the Pope, by his pardons and indulgences, may dispense, and

and place to whose account he pleases, And out of this bank, which is kept at Rome, those who never took care to have any righteousness of their own, may be supplied at reasonable rates.

To which they have added a further supply of grace, if there should be any need of it, by the sacrament of extreme unction, never heard of in the Christian church for many ages; but devised, as it were, on purpose to furnish such foolish virgins with oil, as are here described in the parable.

And thus, by one device or other, they have enervated the Christian religion to that degree, that it hath almost quite lost its true virtue and efficacy upon the hearts and lives of men; and instead of the real fruits of goodness and righteousness, it produceth little else but superstition and folly; or if it produce any real virtues, yet even the virtue of those virtues is in a great measure spoiled by their arrogant pretences of merit and superelevation, and is rendered insignificant to themselves by their insolent carriage and behaviour towards God.

VI. And lastly, If we could suppose any persons to be so overgrown with goodness, as to have more than needs to qualify them for the reward of eternal life; yet there can be no assigning and transferring of this overplus of grace and virtue from one man to another. For we see that all the ways that could be thought on, of begging, or borrowing, or buying oil of others, did all prove ineffectual; because the thing is in its own nature impracticable, that one sinner, who owes all that he hath, and much more, to God, should have any thing to spare wherewithal to merit for another.

Indeed our blessed Saviour hath merited for us all the reward of eternal life, upon the condition of faith, and repentance, and obedience: but the infinite merit of his obedience and sufferings will be of no benefit and advantage to us, if we ourselves be not really and inherently righteous. So St John tells us, and warns us to beware of the contrary conceit: *Little children, let no man deceive you: he that doth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous.*

If we do sincerely endeavour to please God, and to keep his commandments, in the general course of a holy
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and virtuous life, the merit of Christ's perfect obedience and sufferings will be available with God for the acceptance of our sincere, though but imperfect obedience. But if we take no care to be righteous and good ourselves, the perfect righteousness of Christ will do us no good; much less the imperfect righteousness of any other man who is a sinner himself. And the holiest man that ever was upon earth, can no more assign and make over his righteousness, or repentance, or any part of either, to another that wants it, than a man can bequeath his wisdom or learning to his heir or his friend; no more than a sick man can be restored to health by virtue of the physic which another man hath taken.

Let no man therefore think of being good by a deputy, that cannot be contented to be happy and to be saved the same way; that is, to go to hell, and be tormented there in person, and to go to heaven, and be admitted into that place of bliss only by proxy. So that these good works with a hard name, and the making over the merit of them to others, have no manner of foundation either in scripture or reason, but are all mere fancy and fiction in divinity.

The inference from all this shall be, the application which our Saviour makes of this parable, ver. 13. *Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh*: as if he had said, The design of this parable is, to instruct us, that we ought to be continually vigilant, and always upon our guard, and in a constant readiness and preparation to meet the bridegroom; because we know not the time of his coming to judgement, nor yet, which will be of the same consequence and concernment to us, do any of us know the precise time of our own death. Either of these may happen at any time, and come when we least expect them. And therefore we should make the best and speediest provision that we can for another world, and should be continually upon our watch, and trimming our lamps, that we may not be surprised by either of these; neither by our own particular death, nor by the general judgement of the world; *because the Son of man will come in a day when we look not for him, and at an hour when we are not aware.*

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More particularly, we should take up a present and effectual resolution, not to delay our repentance, and the reformation of our lives, that we may not have that great work to do, when we are not fit to do any thing; no, not to dispose of our temporal concernments; much less to prepare for eternity, and to do that in a few moments, which ought to have been the care and endeavour of our whole lives: that we may not be forced to huddle up an imperfect, and I fear an insignificant repentance; and to do that in great haste and confusion, which certainly does require our wisest and most deliberate thoughts, and all the consideration in the world.

And we should provide store of oil in our vessels, wherewith to supply our lamps, that they may burn bright to the last; I mean, we should improve the grace which we received in baptism, by abounding in the fruits of the spirit, and in all the substantial virtues of a good life; that so *an entrance may be ministered to us abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.*

By this means, when we are called to meet the bridegroom, we shall not be put to those miserable and sharking shifts which the foolish virgins were driven to, of begging, or borrowing, or buying oil; which will all fail us, when we come to depend upon them: and though the dying man may make a hard shift to support himself with these false comforts for a little while; yet when the short delusion is over, which will be as soon as ever he is stepped into the other world, he will, to his everlasting confusion and trouble, find the door of heaven shut against him; and that, notwithstanding all his vast treasure of pardons and indulgences, which have cost him so much, and are worth so little, he *shall never see the kingdom of God.*

And, lastly, we should take great care that we do not extinguish our lamps, by quitting the profession of our holy religion upon any temptation of advantage, or for fear of any loss or suffering whatsoever. This occasion will call for all our faith and patience, all our courage and constancy.

Nunc animis opus, Ænea, nunc pectore firmo.

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When it comes to this trial, we had need to *gird up the loins of our minds*, to summon all our forces, and to *put on the whole armour of God*, that we may be able to *stand fast in an evil day*, and when we have done all to *stand*.

And now, my brethren, to use the words of St Peter, chap. v. 12. *I testify unto you, that this is the true grace of God wherein ye stand*. The Protestant reformed religion, which we in this nation profess, is the very gospel of Christ, the true ancient Christianity.

And, for God's sake, since in this hour of temptation, when our religion is in so apparent hazard, we pretend to love it to that degree, as to be contented to part with any thing for it, let us resolve to practise it; and to testify our love to it, in the same way that our Saviour would have us shew our love to him, by keeping his commandments.

I will conclude all with the Apostle's exhortation, so very proper for this purpose, and to this present time, Phil. i. 27. *Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ*; that is, chiefly and above all, take care to lead lives suitable to the Christian religion: and then, as it follows, *stand fast in one spirit, with one mind, striving together for the faith of the gospel*: and in nothing terrified by your adversaries, which to them is an evident token of perdition, but to you of salvation, and that of God.

Now unto him that is able to *stablish you in the gospel*, and to keep you from falling; and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy: to the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen.

S E R M O N XXXII.

A thanksgiving sermon for our deliverance by
the Prince of Orange.

Preached at Lincoln's-Inn chapel, January 31. 1688.

The E P I S T L E D E D I C A T O R Y.

To the Worshipful the MASTERS of the BENCH, and
the rest of the Gentlemen of the Honourable Society
of LINCOLN'S INN.

Though I was at first very unwilling to expose to the public a sermon made upon so little warning, and so great an occasion; yet upon second thoughts, I could not think it fit to resist the unanimous and earnest request of so many worthy persons, as the masters of the Bench of this honourable society; to whom I stand so much indebted for your great and continued respects to me, and kind acceptance of my labours among you for now above the space of five and twenty years. In a most grateful acknowledgement whereof, this discourse, such as it is, in mere obedience to your commands, is now humbly presented to you, by

Your most obliged and faithful servant,

JO. TILLOTSON.

Feb. 28.
1688 $\frac{8}{9}$.

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The S E R M O N.

E Z R A ix. 13. 14.

And after all that is come upon us for our evil deeds, and for our great trespasss, seeing that thou our God hast punished us less than our iniquities deserve, and hast given us such a deliverance as this :

Should we again break thy commandments, and join in affinity with the people of these abominations ; wouldst not thou be angry with us till thou hadst consumed us, so that there should be no remnant nor escaping ?

I Am sufficiently aware, that the particular occasion of these words is, in several respects, very different from the occasion of this day's solemnity. For these words were spoken by Ezra, at a time appointed for public and solemn humiliation. But I shall not now consider them in that relation, but rather as they refer to that great deliverance which God had so lately wrought for them ; and as they are a caution to take heed of abusing great mercies received from God ; and so they are very proper and pertinent to the great occasion of this day. Nay, these words, even in their saddest aspect, are not so unsuitable to it. For we find in scripture, upon the most solemn occasions of humiliation, that good men have always testified a thankful sense of the goodness of God to them. And indeed the mercy of God doth then appear above measure merciful, when the sinner is most deeply sensible of his own vileness and unworthiness. And so Ezra here, in the depth of their sorrow and humiliation, hath so great a sense of the greatness of their deliverance, that he hardly knew how to express it : *And hast given us such a deliverance as this.* And, on the other hand, we find that good men, in their most solemn praises and thanksgivings, have made very serious reflections upon their own unworthiness. And surely the best way to make men truly thankful, is, first to make them very humble. When David makes his most solemn acknowledgements to God for his great mercies to him, how doth he

he abase himself before him? 1 Chron. xxix. 14. *But who am I, and what is my people?* And so likewise, after he had summoned all the powers and faculties of his soul to join in the praises of God, he interposeth this seasonable meditation, Psal. ciii. 10. *He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities.* The greater and more lively sense we have of the goodness of God to us, the more we shall abhor ourselves in dust and ashes; nothing being more apt to melt us into tears of repentance, than the consideration of great and undeserved mercies vouchsafed to us. *The goodness of God doth naturally lead to repentance.*

Having thus reconciled the text to the present occasion, I shall, for the more distinct handling of the words, take notice of these two parts in them.

1. Here is a case supposed, *Should we: After all that is come upon us for our evil deeds, and since God hath punished us less than our iniquities deserve, and hath given us such a deliverance as this; should we again break his commandments?*

2. Here is sentence and determination in the case: *Wouldst thou not be angry with us till thou hadst consumed us, so that there should be no remnant nor escaping?* This is not spoken doubtfully, though it be put by way of question; but is the more vehemently positive, the more peremptorily affirmative: as if he had said, It cannot otherwise be in reason expected, but that after such repeated provocations, *God should be angry with us till he had consumed us.*

First, Here is a case supposed, *Should we: After all that is come upon us for our evil deeds, and for our great trespass, and since God hath punished us less than our iniquities deserve, and hath given us such a deliverance as this; should we again break his commandments, and join in affinity with the people of these abominations?* In which words, these following propositions seem to be involved; which I shall but just mention, and pass to the second part of the text.

1. That sin is the cause of all our sufferings: *After all that is come upon us for our evil deeds, and for our great trespass.* Our evil deeds bring all other evils upon us.

2. That

2. That great sins have usually a proportionable punishment: *After all that is come upon us*, there is the greatness of our punishment; *for our evil deeds, and for our great trespasss*, there is the greatness of our sin. But, when I say that great sins have a proportionable punishment, I do not mean that any temporal punishments are proportionable to the great evil of sin; but that God doth usually observe a proportion in the temporal punishments of sin; so that, although no temporal punishment be proportionable to sin, yet the temporal punishment of one sin holds a proportion to the punishment of another, and consequently lesser and greater sins have proportionably a lesser and greater punishment.

3. That all the punishments which God inflicts in this life, do fall short of the demerit of our sins: *And seeing that our God has punished less than our iniquities deserve*. In the Hebrew it is, *and hast kept down our iniquities*; that is, that they should not rise up against us. The LXX. expresseth it very emphatically, *Thou hast eased us of our sins*; that is, Thou hast not let the whole weight of them fall upon us. Were it not for the restraints which God puts upon his anger, and the merciful mitigations of it, the sinner would not be able to bear it, but must sink under it. Indeed it is only said in the text, that the punishment which God inflicted upon the Jews, tho' it was a long captivity, was beneath the desert of their sins: but yet it is universally true, and Ezra perhaps might intend to insinuate so much, that all temporal punishments, though never so severe, are always less than our iniquities deserve.

4. That God many times works very great deliverances for those who are very unworthy of them: *And hast given us such a deliverance as this*, notwithstanding our evil deeds, and notwithstanding our great trespasss.

5. That we are but too apt, even after great judgments, and after great mercies, to relapse into our former sins; *Should we again break thy commandments?* Ezra insinuates, that there was great reason to fear this, especially considering the strange temper of that people; who, when God multiplied his blessings upon them, were so apt to wax fat, and kick against him: and though he had cast them several times into the furnace of affliction, tho'

they were melted for the present; yet they were many times but the harder for it afterwards.

6. That it is good to take notice of those particular sins which have brought the judgements of God upon us. So Ezra does here: *After all that is come upon us for our evil deeds, and for our great trespass; and, Should we again join in affinity with the people of these abominations.*

Secondly, Here is a sentence and determination in the case: *Wouldst thou not be angry with us till thou hadst consumed us, so that there should be no remnant nor escaping?* Which question, as I said before, doth imply a strong and peremptory affirmative; as if he had said, After such a provocation there is great reason to conclude, that God would be angry with us till he had consumed us.

From whence the observation contained in this part of the text will be this, That it is a fearful aggravation of sin, and a sad presage of ruin to a people, after great judgements and great deliverances, to return to sin, and especially to the same sins again. Hear how passionately Ezra expresses himself in this case, ver. 6. *I am ashamed, O my God, and blush to lift up mine eyes to thee, my God.* Why? what was the cause of this great shame and confusion of face? He tells us, ver. 9. *For we were bond-men, yet our God hath not forsaken us in our bondage, but hath extended his mercy to us, to give us a reviving, to set up the house of our God, and to repair the desolations thereof, and to give us a wall in Judah, and in Jerusalem; that is, to restore to them the free and safe exercise of their religion.* Here was great mercy, and a mighty deliverance indeed: and yet, after this, they presently relapsed into a very great sin, ver. 10. *And now, O our God, what shall we say after this? for we have forsaken thy commandments.*

In the handling of this observation, I shall do these two things.

1. I shall endeavour to shew, that this is a very heavy aggravation of sin. And,

2. That it is a fatal presage of ruin to a people.

I. It is a heavy aggravation of sin, after great judgements, and after signal mercies and deliverances, to re-
turn

turn to sin, and especially to the same sins again. Here are three things to be distinctly spoken to.

1. That it is a great aggravation of sin, to return to it after great judgements.

2. To do this after great mercies and deliverances.

3. After both, to return to the same sins again.

1. It is a great aggravation of sin, after great judgements have been upon us, to return to an evil course; because this is an argument of great obstinacy in evil. The longer Pharaoh resisted the judgements of God, the more was his wicked heart hardened, till at last he arrived at a monstrous degree of hardness; having been, as the text tells us, hardened under ten plagues. And we find, that after God had threatened the people of Israel with several judgements, he tells them, Lev. xxvi. 23. *that if they will not be reformed by all these things, he will punish them seven times more for their sins.* And if the just God will in such a case punish seven times more, we may conclude, that the sin is seven times greater.

What sad complaints doth the Prophet make of the people of Israel growing worse for judgements! *Ah! sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, children that have been corrupters, a seed of evil doers,* Is. i. 4. He can hardly find words enough to express how great sinners they were: and he adds the reason in the next verse, *Why should they be smitten any more? they will revolt more and more,* ver. 5. They were but the worse for judgements. This renders them *a sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity.* And again, Is. ix. 12. 13. *The people turneth not to him that smiteth them, neither do they seek the Lord of hosts: therefore his anger is not turned away, but his hand is stretched out still.* And Is. xxvi. 11. the same Prophet further complains to the same purpose, *When thy hand is lifted up, they will not see.* There is a particular brand set upon King Ahaz, because affliction made him worse, 2 Chron. xxviii. 22. *This is that King Ahaz; that is, that grievous and notorious sinner.* And what was it that rendered him so? *In the time of his distress he sinned yet more against the Lord.* This is that King Ahaz, who is said to have provoked the Lord above all the Kings of Israel which were before him.

2. It is likewise a fore aggravation of sin, when it is committed after great mercies and deliverances vouchsafed to us; because this is an argument of great ingratitude. And this we find recorded as a heavy charge upon the people of Israel, that *they remembered not the Lord their God, who had delivered them out of the hand of all their enemies on every side: neither shewed they kindness to the house of Jerubbaal, namely Gideon, who had been their deliverer, according to all the goodness which he had shewed to Israel*, Judg. viii. 34. 35. God, we see, takes it very ill at our hands, when we are ungrateful to the instruments of our deliverance; but much more, when we are unthankful to him the author of it. And how severely doth Nathan the prophet reproach David upon this account? *Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, I anointed thee king over Israel, and delivered thee out of the hand of Saul, &c. and if this had been too little, I would moreover have done such and such things. Wherefore hast thou despised the commandment of the Lord, to do evil in his sight?* God here reckons up his manifold mercies and deliverances, and aggravates David's sin upon this account. And he was very angry likewise with Solomon for the same reason, *because he had turned from the Lord God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice*, 1 Kings xi. 9. However we may slight the mercies of God, he keeps a punctual and strict account of them. It is particularly noted, as a great blot upon Hezekiah, that *he returned not again, according unto the benefits done unto him*, 2 Chron. xxxii. 25. God takes very severe notice of all the unkind and unworthy returns that are made to him for his goodness.

Ingratitude to God is so unnatural and monstrous, that we find him appealing against us for it to the inanimate creatures, Is. i. 2. *Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth: for the Lord hath spoken, I have nourished and brought up children, but they have rebelled against me.* And then he goes on and upbraids them with the brute creatures, as being more grateful to men, than men are to God: *The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib: but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider*, ver. 3. And in the same prophet there is the like complaint, Is. xxvi. 10. 11. *Let favour be shewed to the wicked,*

wicked, yet he will not learn righteousness : in the land of uprightness will he deal unjustly, and will not behold the majesty of the Lord. Lord, when thy hand is lifted up, they will not see : but they shall see, and be ashamed. They that will not acknowledge the mercies of God's providence, shall feel the strokes of his justice.

There is no greater evidence in the world of an intractable disposition, than not to be wrought upon by kindness, not to be melted by mercies, not to be obliged by benefits, not to be tamed by gentle usage. Nay, God expects that his mercies should lay so great an obligation upon us, that even a miracle should not tempt us to be unthankful : *If there arise among you a prophet, (says Moses to the people of Israel, Deut. xiii. 1. 2. 3.), or a dreamer of dreams, and giveth thee a sign or a wonder, and the sign or the wonder cometh to pass, whereof he spake to thee, saying, Let us go after other gods, and serve them : thou shalt not hearken to the words of that prophet. And he gives the reason, ver. 5. Because he hath spoken to turn you away from the Lord God of Israel, which brought you out of the land of Egypt, and delivered you out of the house of bondage.*

3. It is a greater aggravation yet, after great mercies and judgements, to return to the same sins : because this can hardly be without our sinning against knowledge, and after we are convinced how evil and bitter the sin is which we were guilty of, and have been so forely punished for before. This is an argument of a very perverse and incorrigible temper ; and that which made the sin of the people of Israel so above measure sinful, that after so many signal deliverances, and so many terrible judgements, they fell into the same sin of murmuring ten times ; murmuring against God the author, and against Moses the glorious instrument of their deliverance out of Egypt ; which was one of the two great types of the Old Testament, both of temporal and spiritual oppression and tyranny. Hear with what resentment God speaks of the ill returns which they made to him for that great mercy and deliverance : Numb. xiv. 22. 23. *Because all those men which have seen my glory, and my miracles which I did in Egypt, and in the wilderness, and have tempted me now these ten times, and have not hearkened unto my voice ; surely*

ly they shall not see the land which I swear unto their fathers. And after he had brought them into the promised land, and wrought great deliverances for them several times, how does he upbraid them with their proneness to fall again into the same sin of idolatry? Judg. x. 11. 12. 13. 14. *And the Lord said unto the children of Israel, Did not I deliver you from the Egyptians, and from the Amorites, from the children of Ammon, and from the Philistines? The Zidonians also, and the Amalekites, and the Maonites did oppress you, and ye cried unto me, and I delivered you out of their hand. Yet ye have forsaken me, and served other gods: wherefore I will deliver you no more. Go and cry unto the gods which ye have chosen; let them deliver you in the time of your tribulation.* This incensed God so highly against them, that they still relapsed into the same sin of idolatry, after so many afflictions, and so many deliverances. Upon such an occasion well might the prophet say, Jer. ii. 19. *Thine own wickedness shall correct thee, and thy sins shall reprove thee: know therefore that it is an evil and bitter thing, that thou hast forsaken the Lord thy God.* It is hardly possible but we should know, that the wickedness for which we have been so severely corrected, is an evil and bitter thing.

Thus much for the first part of the observation, namely, That it is a fearful aggravation of sin, after great judgements, and great deliverances, to return to sin, and especially to the same sins again. I proceed to the

II. Second part, namely, That this is a fatal presage of ruin to a people: *Should we again break thy commandments, and join in affinity with the people of these abominations; would thou not be angry with us till thou hadst consumed us, so that there should be no remnant nor escaping?* And so God threatens the people of Israel in the text which I cited before, *Wherefore I will deliver you no more,* Judg. x. 13. *Wherefore;* that is, because they would neither be reformed by the afflictions wherewith God had exercised them, nor by the many wonderful deliverances which he had wrought for them.

And there is great reason why God should deal thus with a people that continues impenitent both under the judgements and mercies of God.

I. Because

1. Because this doth ripen the sins of a nation ; and is it time for God to put in his sickle when a people are ripe for ruin. When the measure of their sins is full, it is no wonder if the cup of his indignation begin to overflow. It is said of the Amorites, four hundred years before God brought that fearful ruin upon them, that God deferred the extirpation of them ; because, Gen. xv. 16. *the iniquity of the Amorites was not yet full.* When neither the mercies nor the judgements of God will bring us to repentance, we are then fit for destruction ; according to that of the apostle, Rom. ix. 22. *What if God, willing to shew his wrath, and make his power known, endured with much long-suffering the vessels of wrath fitted for destruction ?* They who are not wrought upon neither by the patience of God's mercies, nor by the patience of his judgements, seem to be fitted and prepared, to be ripe and ready for destruction.

2. Because this incorrigible temper shews the case of such persons to be desperate and incurable : If. i. 5. *Why should they be smitten any more ?* says God of the people of Israel, *they will revolt more and more.* Matth. xxiii. 37. 38. *How often would I have gathered you,* says our blessed Saviour to the Jews, *even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not ! Behold, your house is left to you desolate ;* that is, Ye shall be utterly destroyed ; as it happened forty years after to Jerusalem, and to the whole Jewish nation.

When God sees that all the means which he can use do prove ineffectual, and to no purpose, he will then give over a people, as physicians do their patients when they see that nature is spent, and their case past remedy. When men will not be the better for the best means that heaven can use, God will then leave them to reap the fruit of their own doings, and abandon them to the demerit of their sin.

That which now remains, is, to apply this to ourselves, and to the solemn occasion of this day.

And if this be our case, let us take heed that this be not also our doom and sentence.

First, The case in the text doth very much resemble ours ; and that in three respects. God hath sent great judgements upon us *for our evil deeds, and for our great trespasses :*

trespasses : he hath punished us less than our iniquities have deserved ; and hath given us a very great and wonderful deliverance.

I. God hath inflicted great judgements upon us *for our evil deeds and for our great trespasses*. Great judgements, both for the quality and for the continuance of them. It shall suffice only to mention those which are of a more ancient date. Scarce hath any nation been more calamitous than this of ours, both in respect of the invasions and conquests of foreigners, and of our own civil and intestine divisions. Four times we have been conquered ; by the Romans, Saxons, Danes, and Normans. And our intestine divisions have likewise been great, and of long continuance. Witness the Barons wars, and that long and cruel contest between the two houses of York and Lancaster.

But to come nearer to our own times, What fearful judgements and calamities of war, and pestilence, and fire, have many of us seen ? and how close did they follow one another ? What terrible havock did the sword make amongst us for many years ? and this not the sword of a foreign enemy, but of a civil war ; the mischiefs whereof were all terminated upon ourselves, and have given deep wounds, and left broad scars upon the most considerable families in the nation.

— *Alta manent civilis vulnera dextræ.*

This war was drawn out to a great length, and had a tragical end, in the murder of an excellent king, and in the banishment of his children into a strange country, whereby they were exposed to the arts and practices of those of another religion ; the mischievous consequences whereof we have ever since sadly laboured under, and do feel them at this day.

And when God was pleased in great mercy at last to put an end to the miserable distractions and confusions of almost twenty years, by the happy restoration of the royal family, and our ancient government ; which seemed to promise to us a lasting settlement, and all the felicities we could wish : yet how soon was this bright and glorious morning overcast, by the restless and black designs of that sure and inveterate enemy of ours, the church

church of Rome, for the restoring of their religion amongst us? And there was too much encouragement given to this design by those who had power in their hands, and had brought home with them a secret goodwill to it.

For this *great trespass*, and for our many other sins, God was angry with us, and sent among us the most raging pestilence that ever was known in this nation, which, in the space of eight or nine months, swept away near a third part of the inhabitants of this vast and populous city, and of the suburbs thereof; besides a great many thousands more in several parts of the nation: *But we did not return to the Lord, nor seek him for all this.*

And therefore, the very next year after, God sent a terrible and devouring fire, which in less than three days time laid the greatest part of this great city in ashes. And there is too much reason to believe, that the enemy did this, that perpetual and implacable enemy of the peace and happiness of this nation.

And even since the time of that dreadful calamity, which is now above twenty years ago, we have been in a continual fear of the cruel designs of that party; which had hitherto been incessantly working under ground, but now began to shew themselves more openly: and especially since a prince of that religion succeeded to the crown, our eyes have been ready to *fail us for fear, and for looking after* those dreadful things that were coming upon us, and seemed to be even at the door: A fear which this nation could easily have rid itself of, because they that caused it were but a handful in comparison of us, and could have done nothing without a foreign force and assistance; had not the principles of humanity, and of our religion too, restrained us from violence and cruelty, and from every thing which had the appearance of undutifulness to the government which the providence of God had set over us. An instance of the like patience, under the like provocations, for so long a time, and after such visible and open attempts upon them, when they had the laws so plainly on their side, I challenge any nation or church in the world, from the very foundation of it, to produce: insomuch that if God had not put it into the hearts of our kind neighbours, and

of that incomparable prince who laid and conducted that great design with so much skill and secrecy, to have appeared so seasonably for our rescue, our patience had infallibly, without a miracle, been our ruin. And I am sure, if our enemies had ever had the like opportunity in their hands, and had overbalanced us in numbers but half so much as we did them, they would never have let it slip; but would long since have extirpated us utterly, and have *made the remembrance of us to have ceased among men.*

And now, if you ask me, for what sins more especially God hath sent all these judgements upon us? it will not, I think, become us to be very particular and positive in such determinations. Thus much is certain, that we have all sinned, and contributed to these judgements; every one hath had some hand, more or less, in pulling down this vengeance upon the nation. But we are all too apt to remove the meritorious cause of God's judgements as far as we can from ourselves, and our own party, and, upon any slight pretence, to lay it upon others.

Yet I will venture to instance in one or two things which may probably enough have had a more particular and immediate hand in drawing down the judgements of God upon us.

Our horrible contempt of religion on the one hand, by our infidelity and profaneness, and our shameful abuse of it, on the other; by our gross hypocrisy, and sheltering great wickedness and immoralities under the cloak and profession of religion.

And then great dissensions and divisions, great uncharitableness and bitterness of spirit among those of the same religion: so that, almost from the beginning of our happy reformation, the enemy had sowed these tares, and, by the unwearied malice and arts of the church of Rome, the seeds of dissension were scattered very early amongst us; and a sour humour had been fermenting in the body of the nation, both upon account of religion and civil interests, for a long time before things broke out into a civil war.

And more particularly yet: That which is called the *great trespass* here in the text, their *joining in affinity* with

with the people of these abominations, by whom they had been detained in a long captivity: this, I say, seems to have had, both from the nature of the thing, and the just judgement of God, no small influence upon a great part of the miseries and calamities which have befallen us. For had it not been for the countenance which Popery had by the marriages and alliances of our princes, for two or three generations together, with those of that religion, it had not probably had a continuance among us to this day: which will, I hope, now be a good warning to those who have the authority to do it, to make effectual provision by law for the prevention of the like inconvenience and mischief in this nation for ever.

2. Another parallel between our case and that in the text is, that *God hath punished us less than our iniquities did deserve.* And this acknowledgement we have as much reason to make for ourselves, as Ezra had to do it in behalf of the Jews: *Thou our God hast punished us less than our iniquities deserve. Thou our God hast punished us;* there is the reason of so much mercy and mitigation. It is God, and not man, with whom we have to do; and therefore it is that we *the children of men are not consumed.* And it is *our* God likewise, to whom we have a more peculiar relation, and with whom, by virtue of our profession of Christianity, we are in covenant: *Thou our God hast punished us less than our iniquities deserve.* He might justly have poured forth all his wrath, and have made his jealousy to have smoked against us, and have blotted out the remembrance of us from under heaven; he might have given us up to the will of our enemies, and into the hands of those whose tender mercies are cruelty; he might have brought us into the net which they had spread for us, and have laid a terrible load of affliction upon our loins, and suffered insolent men to ride over our heads, and them that hated us with a perfect hatred to have had the rule over us: but he was graciously pleased to remember mercy in the midst of judgement, and to repent himself for his servants, when he saw that their power was gone; and that things were come to that extremity, that we were in all human probability utterly unable to have wrought out our own deliverance.

3. The last parallel between our case and that in the

text is, the great and wonderful deliverance which God hath wrought for us. And whilst I am speaking of this, *God is my witness, whom I serve in the gospel of his Son*, that I do not say one word upon this occasion in flattery to men, but in true thankfulness to almighty God; and constrained thereto from a just sense of his great mercy to us all, in this marvellous deliverance, in this mighty salvation which he wrought for us. So that we may say with Ezra, *Since thou our God hast given us such a deliverance as THIS*; so great, that we know not how to compare it with any thing but itself. God hath given us *this deliverance*. And therefore, *Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but to thy name be the praise*: for thou knowest, and we are conscious to ourselves, that we did in no ways deserve it, but quite the contrary. God hath given it, and it ought to be so much the welcomer to us for coming from such a hand. *It is the Lord's doing*, and therefore ought to be the more *marvellous in our eyes*. It is a deliverance full of mercy, and, I had almost said, full of miracle: *the finger of God* was visibly in it; and there are plain signatures and characters upon it, of a more immediate divine interposition. And if we will not *wisely consider the Lord's doing*, we have reason to stand in awe of that threatening of his, Psal. xxviii. 5. *Because they regard not the works of the Lord, nor the operation of his hands, he shall destroy them, and not build them up*.

It was a wonderful deliverance indeed, if we consider all the circumstances of it; the greatness of it, the strangeness of the means whereby it was brought about, and the suddenness and easiness of it.

The greatness of it. It was a great deliverance, from the greatest fears, and from the greatest dangers; the apparent and imminent danger of the saddest thralldom and bondage, civil and spiritual, both of soul and body.

And it was brought about in a very extraordinary manner, and by very strange means: whether we consider the greatness and difficulty of the enterprize; or the closeness and secrecy of the design, which must of necessity be communicated at least to the chief of those who were to assist and engage in it, especially the states of the United Provinces, who were then in so much danger

ger themselves, and wanted more than their own forces for their own defence and security, (a kindness never to be forgotten by the English nation); and, besides all this, the difficulties and disappointments which happened, after the design was open and manifest, from the uncertainties of wind and weather, and many other accidents impossible to be foreseen and prevented: and yet in conclusion, a strange concurrence of all things on all sides, to bring the thing which the providence of God intended, to a happy issue and effect.

And we must not here forget the many worthies of our nation, who did so generously run all hazards of life and fortune, for the preservation of our religion, and the asserting of our ancient laws and liberties.

These are all strange and unusual means: but, which is stranger yet, the very counsels and methods of our enemies did prepare the way for all this; and perhaps more effectually, than any counsel and contrivance of our own could have done it. For even the Jesuits, those formal politicians by book and rule, without any consideration, or true knowledge of the temper, and interest, and other circumstances of the people they were designing upon, and had to deal withal; and indeed without any care to know them: I say, the Jesuits, who, for so long a time, and for so little reason, have affected the reputation of the deepest and craftiest statesmen in the world, have, upon this great occasion, and when their whole kingdom of darkness lay at stake, by a more than ordinary infatuation and blindness, so outwitted and over-reached themselves in their own counsels, that they have really contributed as much, or more, to our deliverance from the destruction which they had designed to bring upon us, than all our wisest and best friends could have done.

And then, if we consider further, how sudden and surprising it was, so that we could hardly believe it when it was accomplished; and, like the children of Israel, *when the Lord turned again the captivity of Zion, we were like them that dream.* When all things were driving on furiously, and in great haste, then God gave an unexpected check to the designs of men, and stopped them in their full career. Who among us could have imagined,

but a few months ago, so happy and so speedy an end of our fears and troubles? God hath at once scattered all our fears, and outdone all our hopes, by the greatness and suddenness of our deliverance. *O that men would praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men!*

And, lastly, if we consider the cheapness and easiness of this deliverance. All this was done without a battle, and almost without blood. All the danger is, lest we should lothe it, and grow sick of it, because it was so very easy. Had it come upon harder terms, and had we waded to it through a Red sea of blood, we would have valued it more: But this surely is great wantonness, and, whatever we think of it, one of the highest provocations imaginable. For there can hardly be a fouler and blacker ingratitude towards Almighty God, than to slight so great a deliverance, only because it came to us so easily, and hath cost us so very cheap.

I will mention but one circumstance more, which may not be altogether unworthy our observation: That God seems, in this last deliverance, in some sort to have united and brought together all the great deliverances which he hath been pleased to work for this nation, against all the remarkable attempts of Popery from the beginning of our reformation. Our wonderful deliverance from the formidable Spanish invasion designed against us, happened in the year 1588: and now, just a hundred years after, God was pleased to bring about this last great and most happy deliverance. That horrid gun-powder conspiracy, without precedent, and without parallel, was designed to have been executed upon the fifth day of November; the same day upon which his Highness the Prince of Orange landed the forces here in England, which he brought hither for our rescue. So that this is a day every way worthy to be solemnly set apart and joyfully celebrated by this church and nation throughout all generations, as the fittest of all other to comprehend, and to put us in mind to commemorate all the great deliverances which God hath wrought for us, from Popery, and its inseparable companion, arbitrary power. And we may then say with the holy Psalmist,
Psal.

Pfal. cxviii. 23. 24. *This is the Lord's doing, it is marvellous in our eyes. This is the day which the Lord hath made, we will rejoice and be glad in it.*

Secondly, As the case in the text is much like ours, so let us take heed, that the doom and sentence there be not so too. *If after all that is come upon us for our evil deeds, and for our great trespasss, and since God hath punished us less than our iniquities did deserve; should we again break his commandments, and join in affinity with the people of these abominations, would he not be angry with us till he had consumed us, so that there should be no remnant nor escaping? What could we in reason expect after all this, but utter ruin and destruction? We may here apply, as St Paul does God's dealing with the people of Israel, to the times of the gospel: for he speaks of it, as an example and admonition to all ages to the end of the world. Now these things, says the Apostle, 1 Cor. x. 6. 7. 9. 10. 11. were our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted. Neither be ye idolaters, as were some of them, &c. Neither let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed of serpents.* For the explication of this passage, we must have recourse to the history, which gives this account of it, Numb. xxi. 5. 6. *And the people spake against God, and against Moses, Wherefore have ye brought us up out of Egypt, to die in the wilderness? &c. impeaching God, and his servant Moses, as if, by this deliverance, they had put them into a much worse condition, than they were in when they were in Egypt. And the Lord sent fiery serpents among the people; and they bit the people, and much people of Israel died.* But how was this a tempting of Christ? *Neither let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted; that is, let not us, now under the gospel, tempt our Saviour and Deliverer, as the Israelites did theirs, by slighting that great deliverance, and by speaking against God, and against Moses. Neither murmur ye, as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed of the destroyer.* And how far this may concern us, and all others, to the end of the world, who shall tempt Christ, the great patron and deliverer of his church, and murmur without cause, as the Israelites did, at the deliverances which he works for them,

them, and against the instruments of it, the Apostle tells us in the next words, ver. 11. *Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples, or types: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come. Let us not tempt Christ, who is now beginning the glorious deliverance of his church from the tyranny of antichrist.*

To draw now towards a conclusion: I will comprehend my advice to you upon the whole matter in as few words as I can.

Let us use this great deliverance which God hath given us, *such a deliverance as this, from our enemies, and from the hand of all that hate us*: not by using them as they would have done us, had we fallen under their power, with great insolence, and rage, and cruelty; but with great moderation and clemency, making as few examples of severity as will be consistent with our future security from the like attempts upon our religion and laws. And even in the execution of justice upon the greatest offenders, let us not give so much countenance to the ill examples which have been set, of extravagant fines and punishments, as to imitate those patterns, which with so much reason we abhor; no, not in the punishment of the authors of them.

And let us endeavour, for once, to be so wise, as not to forfeit the fruits of this deliverance, and to hinder ourselves of the benefit and advantage of it, by breaches and divisions among ourselves. As we have no reason to desire it, so I think we can hardly ever hope to understand Popery better, and the cruel designs of it, than we do already, both from the long trial and experience which we have had of it in this nation, and likewise from that dismal and horrid view, which hath of late been given us, of the true spirit and temper of it, in one of our neighbour nations, which hath long pretended to the profession of the most refined and moderate Popery in the world; but hath now at last shewed itself in its true colours, and in the perfection of a persecuting spirit; and hath therein given us a most sad and deplorable instance of a religion corrupted and degenerated into that which, if it be possible, is worse than none.

And since, by the undeserved mercy of God to us,
we

we have upon such easy terms, in comparifon, efcaped their rage and fury; let us now at length refolve, *never to join in affinity with the people of thefe abominations*; fince our alliances with them by marriage have had fo fatal an influence, both upon the public peace and tranquillity of the nation, and upon the welfare alfo of private families. I have known many inftances of this kind, but hardly ever yet faw one that proved happy; but a great many, that have been pernicious and ruinous to thofe Proteftant families in which fuch unequal, and, as I think, unlawful matches have been made: not that fuch marriages are void in themfelves; but yet for all that finful; becaufe of the apparent danger and temptation to which thofe of our church and religion that enter into them, do evidently expofe themfelves, of being feduc'd from their religion; not by the good arguments which the other can offer to that purpofe, but by the ill arts which they have the confidence and the confcience to make ufe of, in the making of profelytes.

And let us pay our moft hearty and thankful acknowledgements, chiefly, and in the firft place, to Almighty God, the bleffed author of this deliverance; and, under him, to that happy inftrument whom God hath been pleas'd, in great pity to this finful and unworthy nation, to raife up on purpofe for it, his Highnefs the Prince of Orange; and to that end did, in his all-wife providence, lay the foundation of our then future deliverance, in that auspicious match, which was concluded here in England about eleven years ago, between this renowned Prince and our excellent Princefs.

This is that moft illuftrious houfe of Naffau and Orange, which God hath fo highly honoured above all the families of the earth, to give a check to the two great aspiring monarchies of the Weft, and bold attempters upon the liberties of Europe; to the one in the laft age, and to the other in the prefent; as if the princes of this valiant and victorious line had been of the race of Hercules, born to refcue mankind from oppreffion, and to quell monfters.

And, laftly, let us befeech Almighty God, all whole ways and works are perfect, that he would *eftablifh that which he hath wrought, and ftill carry it on to farther and greater*

greater perfection. Which, after such an earnest of his favour and good-will to us, we have no reason to doubt, but that he is ready to do for us. If by our own fickleness and inconstancy, disgusting the deliverance now it is come, which we so earnestly desired before it came; if by our ungrateful murmurings and discontents, by our own foolish heats and animosities, kindled and carried on by the ill designs of some, working upon the tenderness and scruples of others, under the specious pretences of conscience and loyalty: I say, if by some or all these ways we do not refuse the blessing which God now offers, and defeat and frustrate the merciful design of this wonderful revolution, God will still *rejoice over us, to do us good, and think thoughts of peace towards us, thoughts of good, and not of evil, to give us an expected end of our long troubles and confusions.*

But, if we will *not know in this our day the things which belong to our peace*, our destruction will then be of ourselves; and there will be no need that God should be angry with us; for we shall be undone by our own differences and quarrels about the way and means of our being saved, and so be angry with one another till we be consumed. Which God, of his infinite goodness, give us all the grace and wisdom to prevent, for his mercies sake in Jesus Christ. To whom, with thee, O Father, and the Holy Ghost, be all honour and glory, thanksgiving and praise, both now and ever. *Amen.*

S E R-

S E R M O N XXXIII.

Of forgiveness of injuries, and against revenge.

Preached before the Queen, at Whitehall, March 8. 1688-9.

MATTH. V. 44.

But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, pray for them that despitefully use you, and persecute you.

THE gospel hath promised forgiveness of sins to us, upon two conditions: That we sincerely repent of the sins which we have committed against God; and, That we heartily forgive to men the injuries and offences which they have been guilty of towards us.

I shall at this time, by God's assistance, treat of the latter of these, from the words which I have recited to you; which are part of our Saviour's excellent sermon upon the mount: in which he doth not only explain, but enlarge and perfect, the moral and natural law, by adding to it precepts and prohibitions of greater perfection, than either the law of Moses, or the natural law, in their largest extent, did contain.

He forbids polygamy, and divorce, except only in the case of adultery, and likewise revenge; none of which were forbidden, either by the law of nature, or by the law which was given by Moses.

And to these prohibitions our blessed Saviour adds several new precepts, of greater perfection than any laws that were extant before. *But I say unto you, Love your enemies.* The Jewish law commanded them to love their neighbours, meaning their brethren, and those of their own nation: but our Saviour, by commanding us to love

love our enemies, hath, in the most emphatical manner that can be, commanded us to love all men. For, if any were to be excluded from our charity, none so likely to be so as our enemies. So that, after a command to love our enemies, it was needless to name any others, because men are naturally apt to love those that love them.

I say unto you, Love your enemies : here the inward affection is required. *Bless them that curse you :* here outward civility and affability are required, in opposition to rude and uncivil language ; for so *blessing and cursing* do in scripture frequently signify. *Do good to them that hate you :* here real acts of kindness are commanded to be done by us to our bitterest and most malicious enemies. *Pray for them that despitefully use you, and persecute you :* these are the highest expressions of enmity that can be, calumny and cruelty ; and yet we are commanded to pray for those that touch us in these two tenderest points of all other, our reputation and our life. And to secure the sincerity of our charity towards our enemies, we are required to express it by our hearty prayers to God for them : to God, I say, before whom it is both impious and dangerous to dissemble ; and from whom we can expect no mercy for ourselves, if with feigned lips we beg it of him for others.

You see what is the duty here required, That we bear a sincere affection to our most malicious and implacable enemies, and be ready upon occasion to give real testimony of it.

And, because this may seem a hard duty, and not so easy to be reconciled either to our inclination or our reason, I shall endeavour to shew, that this law is not only reasonable, but much more perfect and excellent, and the practice of it more easy and delightful, and upon all accounts much more for our benefit and advantage, than the contrary : and that upon four considerations ; which I shall endeavour to represent with their just advantage, and so as may, I hope, not only convince our judgements of the reasonableness of this precept, but likewise bend and sway our wills to the obedience and practice of it.

I. If

I. If we consider the nature of the act here required, which is, to love; which, when it is not a mere passion, but under the government of our reason, is the most natural, and easy, and delightful of all the affections which God hath planted in human nature: whereas ill-will, and hatred, and revenge, are very troublesome and vexatious passions. Both the devising of mischief, and the accomplishment of it, and the reflection upon it afterwards, are all uneasy; and the consequences of it many times pernicious to ourselves. The very design of revenge is troublesome, and puts the spirits into an unnatural fermentation and tumult. The man that meditates it, is always restless; his very soul is stung, swells and boils, is in pain and anguish, hath no ease, no enjoyment of itself, so long as this passion reigns. The execution of it may perhaps be attended with some present pleasure; but that pleasure is unreasonable and brutish, momentary and short, like a flash of lightening, which vanisheth in the twinkling of an eye.

It is commonly said, that revenge is sweet; but to a calm and considerate mind, patience and forgiveness are sweeter, and do afford a much more rational, and solid, and durable pleasure, than revenge. The monuments of our mercy and goodness are a far more pleasing and delightful spectacle, than of our rage and cruelty. And no sort of thought does usually haunt men with more terror, than the reflection upon what they have done in the way of revenge.

Besides, that the consequences of this passion do commonly prove very prejudicial to ourselves. For the revenge of one injury doth naturally draw on more, and will oblige us for the same reason to a new revenge of them; and this brings on a perpetual and endless circulation of injuries and revenges. So that whoever seeks revenge upon another, doth commonly in the issue take it upon himself; and whilst he thinks to transfer the injury which he hath received upon him that did it, he doubles it upon himself.

Such and so great are the troubles and inconveniences of a malicious and revengeful temper. But *there is no torment in love*, as St John excellently says. To

be kindly affectioned towards all, to bear no grudge or ill-will, no thought of displeasure or revenge towards any man, is the easiest posture, the most pleasant state of the mind. So that, if not for their sakes, yet for our own, we should *love our enemies, and do good to them that hate us*; because to be thus affected towards all men is as great a kindness to ourselves, as it is charity to others.

II. If we consider the qualification of the object. It is our enemy whom we are required to love. In whom though there be something that is justly disgustful, yet there is something also that is lovely; and if we persist in our kindness to him, notwithstanding his enmity to us, the enmity may wear off, and perhaps at length be changed into a sincere and firm friendship.

It is true indeed, that with regard to ourselves personal enmity towards us is one of the most inconvenient qualities that a man can have; but not therefore the worst in itself. If we could be impartial, and lay aside prejudice, we might perhaps discern several very lovely qualities in him who hates us: and virtue is to be owned, and praised, and loved, even in an enemy. And perhaps his enmity towards us is not so great and inexcusable a fault, as we apprehend. He is not perhaps our enemy to that degree, nor so altogether, without cause, as we imagine. Possibly we have provoked him; or by his own mistake, or through the malicious representation of others, he may be induced to think so. And are not we ourselves liable to the like misapprehensions concerning others; of which we are many times afterwards convinced and ashamed? And so may he; and then his enmity will cease, if we will but have a little patience with him, as we always wish in the like case that others would have with us.

At the worst, though never so fore and causeless an enemy, though never so bad a man; yet he is a man, and, as such, hath something in him which the blindest passion cannot deny to be good and amiable. He hath the same nature with ourselves, which we cannot hate or despise, without hatred and contempt of ourselves. Let a man's faults be what they will, they do
not

not destroy his nature, and make him cease to be a man.

The two great foundations of love, are relation and likeness. "No one thing (says Tully) is so like, so equal to another, as one man is to another." What difference soever there may be between us and another man, yea, though he be our enemy, yet he is still like us in the main; and perhaps but too like us in that for which we find so much fault with him, a proneness to offer affronts and injuries.

And there is an essential relation, as well as likeness, between one man and another, which nothing can ever dissolve, because it is founded in that which no man can divest himself of, in human nature. So far is it from being true, which Mr Hobbs asserts as the fundamental principle of his politics, "That men are naturally in a state of war and enmity with one another;" that the contrary principle, laid down by a much deeper and wiser man, I mean Aristotle, is most certainly true, "That men are naturally akin and friends to each other." Some unhappy accidents and occasions may make men enemies, but naturally every man is a friend to another: and that is the surest and most unalterable reason of things which is founded in nature, not that which springs from mutable accidents and occasions. So that whoever is recommended to us under the notion of a man, ought not to be looked upon by us and treated as an enemy.

Consider farther, that an enemy, even whilst he is exercising his enmity towards us, may do us many acts of real advantage; which though they do not proceed from kindness, yet in truth are benefits. The malicious censures of our enemies, if we make a right use of them, may prove of greater advantage to us, than the civilities of our best friends. We can easily afford, nay the wisest of men can hardly forbear, to love a flatterer; to embrace him, and to take him into our bosom: and yet an open enemy is a thousand times better and less dangerous than he. It is good for many men that they have had enemies, who have many times been to them the happy occasion of reforming those faults, which none but an

enemy would have taken the freedom, I had almost said, would have had the friendship, to have told them of.

But what if, after all, this enemy of ours, this hated man, prove to be one of our best friends? for so reconciled enemies usually are. And if any thing will reconcile an enemy, love and kindness will. An obstinate goodness is apt to conquer even the worst of men. It is hardly in the nature of man to withstand the kindness of one whom, by all that we could do, we have not been able to make our enemy. After a man hath done the greatest injury to another, not only to find no revenge following upon it, but the first opportunity taken to oblige him, is so very surprising, that it can hardly fail to gain upon the worst disposition, and to melt down the hardest temper. So that we should love our enemies, if not for what they are at present, yet for what they may be, and in hope that by these means they may in time become our friends.

III. If we consider the excellency and generosity of the thing itself. *To love our enemies, and to do good to them that hate us*, is the perfection of goodness, and the advancement of it to its highest pitch. It is the most excellent and perfect act of the greatest and most perfect of all graces and virtues, I mean, charity; which by St Paul is called *the bond of perfection*; and by St James, *the perfect and the royal law*; because it inspires men with a greatness of mind fit for kings and princes, in whom nothing is more admirable than a generous goodness and clemency, even towards great enemies and offenders, so far as is consistent with the public good. Love for love is but justice and gratitude; love for no love is favour and kindness: but love for hatred and enmity is a most divine temper, a steady and immutable goodness that is not to be stirred by a provocation, and so far from being conquered, that it is rather confirmed by its contrary: for if hatred and enmity do not extinguish love, what can? This is goodness indeed; not only without merit and obligation, without invitation or motive, but against all reasonable expectation, and in despite of all temptation and provocation to the contrary.

So

So that to return good for evil, and love for hatred, is one of the greatest arguments of a great mind, and of deep wisdom and consideration. For naturally our first inclinations and thoughts towards our enemies are full of anger and revenge; but our second and wiser thoughts will tell us, that forgiveness is much more generous than revenge. And a more glorious victory cannot be gained over another man than this, that when the injury began on his part, the kindness should begin on ours. If both the ways were equally in our power, yet it is a much more desirable conquest, to overcome evil with good, than with evil. By this, we can only conquer our enemy, and may perhaps fail in that; but by the other, we certainly conquer ourselves, and perhaps our enemy too; overcoming him in the noblest manner, and walking him gently till he be cool, and without force effectually subduing him to be our friend. This, as one [Dr Barrow] fitly compares it, is like a great and wise general, by art and stratagem, by mere dint of skill and conduct, by patience and wise delay; without ever striking a stroke, or shedding one drop of blood, to vanquish an enemy, and to make an end of the war, without ever putting it to the hazard of a battle.

Revenge is blind and rash, and does always proceed from impotency and weakness of mind. It is anger that spurs men on to it; and anger is certainly one of the foolishlest passions of human nature, and which commonly betrays men to the most imprudent and unreasonable things. So Solomon observes, Prov. xiv. 29. *He that is hasty of spirit, exalteth folly*; and again, Eccles. vii. 9. *Anger resteth in the bosom of fools*. But to be able to bear provocation, is an argument of great wisdom; and to forgive it, of a great mind. So the same wise man tells us, Prov. xvi. 32. *He that is slow to anger, is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit, than he that taketh a city*. It is a greater thing, in case of great provocation, to calm a man's own spirit, than to storm and take a great city.

Whereas the angry man loseth and lets fall the government of himself, and lays the reins upon the neck

of the wild beast, his own brutish appetite and passion; which hurries him on, first to revenge, and then to repentance for the folly which he hath been guilty of in gratifying so unreasonable a passion. For it very seldom happens, that any man executes an act of revenge, but the very next moment after he hath done it, he is sorry for it, and wisheth he had not done it: whereas patience and forgiveness do wisely prevent both the mischief to others, and the trouble to ourselves, which is usually consequent upon revenge.

IV. If we consider the perfection and prevalency of the examples which the gospel proposeth to us, to allure and engage us to the practice of this duty. And they are the examples of God himself, and of the Son of God in the nature of man.

I. The example of God himself. The scripture doth frequently set before us the goodness of God's common providence to sinners for our pattern. And this is the argument whereby our blessed Saviour presseth the duty in the text upon us, in the verse immediately after it: *That ye may be the children of your heavenly Father, who maketh his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and his rain to fall on the just and the unjust.* The same argument Seneca also urgeth to the same purpose: "How many" (says he) "are unworthy of the light, and yet the day visits them?" And, speaking of the gods, "They bestow (says he) their benefits upon the unthankful, and are ready to help those who make a bad construction and use of their kindness." And almost in the very words of our Saviour: *Etiam sceleratis sol oritur, &c.* "The sun riseth even upon the most vile and profligate persons, and the seas are open to pirates."

Thus is God affected towards those who are guilty of the greatest provocations towards him. He bestows upon them the gifts of his common providence; and not only so, but is ready to forgive innumerable offences to them for Christ's sake. This pattern the Apostle proposeth to our imitation, Eph. iv. 32. *Be ye kind, tender-hearted, forbearing one another, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.* Chap. v. 1. *Be ye therefore imitators of God, as dear children.* This temper and disposition of mind is the prime excellency

cellency and perfection of the divine nature ; and who would not be ambitious to be like the most perfect and best of beings ? And so our blessed Saviour concludes this argument in the last verse of this chapter, *Be ye therefore perfect, as your Father which is in heaven is perfect* ; which St Luke renders, *Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father which is in heaven is merciful*. So that, in that very thing which we think to be so hard and difficult, you see that we have perfection itself for our pattern. And this example ought to be of so much greater force with us, by how much greater reason there is, why we should do thus to one another, than why God should do thus to us. Our offences against God are more and greater than any man ever was or could be guilty of towards us : besides, that there are many considerations which ought to tie up our hands, and may reasonably restrain us from falling furiously upon one another, which can have no place at all in God. We may justly fear, that the consequence of our revenge may return upon ourselves, and that it may come to be our own case to stand in need of mercy and forgiveness from others : and therefore, out of necessary caution and prudence, we should take heed not to set any bad example in this kind, lest it should recoil upon ourselves. We who stand so much in need of forgiveness ourselves, ought in all reason to be very easy to forgive others. But now the divine nature is infinitely above any real injury or suffering ; God can never stand in need of pity or forgiveness ; and yet of his own mere goodness, without any interest or design, how slow is he to anger, and how ready to forgive ?

2. And, which comes yet nearer to us, there is also the example of the Son of God, our blessed Saviour ; who in our nature, and in case of the greatest injuries and provocations imaginable, did practise this virtue to the height ; and all this for our sakes, as well as for our example. So that he requires nothing of us, but what he himself submitted to with the greatest patience and constancy of mind in our stead, and wholly for our advantage.

He rendered good for evil to all mankind, and shewed
greater

greater love to us whilst we were enemies to him, than ever any man did to his friend.

He prayed for those that *despitefully used him, and persecuted him*. And this, not upon cool consideration, after the injury was done, and the pain of his sufferings was over; but whilst the sense and smart of them was upon him, and in the very agony and bitterness of death: in the height of all his anguish, he poured out his soul an offering for the sins of men, and his blood a sacrifice to God, for the expiation of the guilt of that very sin whereby they shed it; pleading with God in the behalf of his murderers, the only excuse that was possible to be made for their malice; that is, their ignorance; and spending his last breath in that most charitable prayer for them, *Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do*.

The last declaration which he made of his mind, was love to his enemies; and the last legacy he bequeathed, was an earnest request to God for the forgiveness of his persecutors and murderers.

So that, if any example ought to be dear to us, and effectually to engage us to the imitation of it, this of our blessed Saviour should; since the injuries which he suffered, have saved us from suffering, and the greatest blessing and happiness that ever befall mankind, is due to this excellent example: and then, with what confidence, nay, with what conscience, can we pretend to share in the benefits of this example, without imitating the virtues of it?

Can we seriously contemplate the excessive kindness and charity of the Son of God to the sinful sons of men, after all our bitterest enmity towards him, and most cruel and injurious usage of him; and all this charity exercised towards us, whilst he was under the actual sense and suffering of these things; and yet not be provoked by an example so admirable in itself, and of such mighty advantage to us, *to go and do likewise*?

But notwithstanding the power of these arguments to persuade to this duty, I must not dissemble some objections, which are, I believe, in many of your minds against it; and to which, for the full clearing of this matter,

matter, it will be fit to give some satisfaction. And they are these.

I. That this precept in the text does not seem so well to agree with another of our blessed Saviour's in another evangelist, Luke xvii. 3. 4. *If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him: and if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him.* Here our blessed Saviour seems not to require forgiveness, unless he that hath done the injury declare his repentance for it. But the text plainly requires us to forgive those who are so far from repenting of their enmity, that they still pursue it, and exercise it upon us. Thus our Lord teacheth us, and thus he himself practised towards his persecutors.

But this appearance of contradiction will quickly vanish, if we consider that forgiveness is sometimes taken chiefly for abstaining from revenge. And so far we are to forgive our enemies, even whilst they continue so, and though they do not repent: and not only so, but we are also to pray for them, and to do good offices to them; especially of common humanity: and this is the meaning of the precept in the text. But sometimes forgiveness does signify a perfect reconciliation to those that have offended us, so as to take them again into our friendship; which they are by no means fit for, till they have repented of their enmity, and laid it aside. And this is plainly the meaning of the other text.

II. It is further objected, That this seems to be a very imprudent thing, and of dangerous consequence to ourselves; because by bearing one injury so patiently, and forgiving it so easily, we invite more; and not only tempt our enemy to go on, but others also by his example to do the like: which will make ill-natured men to provoke us on purpose, with a crafty design to wrest benefits from us: for what better trade can a man drive, than to gain benefits in exchange for injuries?

To this I answer three things.

I. It is to be feared, that there are but few so very good, as to make this kind return for injuries: perhaps, of those that call themselves Christians, not one in a hundred. And he is not a cunning man that will venture

to make an enemy, when there is the odds of a hundred to one against him, that this enemy of his will take the first opportunity to take his revenge upon him.

2. It is also on the other hand to be hoped, that but very few are so prodigiously bad, as to make so barbarous a return for the unexpected kindness of a generous enemy. And this is encouragement enough to the practice of this duty, if there be a probable hope that it will have a good effect; and however, if it should fall out otherwise, yet this would not be reason enough to discourage our goodness; especially since the kindness which we do to our friends, is liable almost to an equal objection, that they may prove ungrateful, and become our enemies; it having been often seen, that great benefits, and such as are beyond requital, instead of making a man more a friend, have made him an enemy.

3. Our Saviour never intended by this precept, that our goodness should be blind, and void of all prudence and discretion; but that it should be so managed, as to make our enemy sensible both of his own fault, and of our favour; and so as to give him as little encouragement, as there is reason for it, to hope to find the like favour again upon the like provocation. Our Saviour commands us to do the thing; but hath left it to our prudence, to do it in such a manner, as may be most effectual, both to reclaim the offender, and likewise to secure ourselves against future and further injuries.

III. Lastly, It is objected, What can we do more to our best friends, than to love them and bless them, than to do good to them, and to pray for them? And are we then to make no difference betwixt our enemies and our friends?

Yes, surely: and so we may, notwithstanding this precept; for there are degrees of love, and there are benefits of several rates and sizes. Those of the first rate we may with reason bestow upon our friends; and with those of a second or third rate there is all the reason in the world why our enemies should be very well contented. Besides that we may abstain from revenge, yea, and love our enemy, and wish him and do him good; and yet it will not presently be necessary, that we should take him into our bosom, and treat and trust him as our intimate

intimate and familiar friend: for every one that is not our enemy, is not fit to be our friend; much less one that hath been our enemy, and perhaps is so still. There must be a great change in him that hath been our enemy, and we must have had long experience of him, before it will be fit, if ever it be so, to take him into our friendship.

All that now remains is, to make some inferences from the discourse which I have made upon this argument, by way of application. And they shall be these four.

I. If we think it so very difficult to demean ourselves towards our enemies, as the Christian religion doth plainly require us to do, to forgive them, and love them, and pray for them, and to do good offices to them; then certainly it concerns us in prudence to be very careful how we make enemies to ourselves. One of the first principles of human wisdom, in the conduct of our lives, I have ever thought to be this, to have a few intimate friends, and to make no enemies, if it be possible, to ourselves. St Paul lays a great stress upon this, and presseth it very earnestly: for, after he had forbidden revenge, Rom. xii. 17. *Recompense no man evil for evil*; as if he were very sensible how hard a matter it is to bring men to this, he adviseth in the next words, to prevent, if it be possible, the occasions of revenge; ver. 18. *If it be possible, and as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men*; that is, if we can avoid it, have no enmity with any man: and that for two weighty reasons.

The first I have already intimated: because it is so very hard to behave ourselves towards enemies as we ought. This we shall find to be a difficult duty to flesh and blood: and it will require great wisdom and consideration, and humility of mind, for a man to bring down his spirit to the obedience of this command; for the fewer enemies we have, the less occasion will there be of contesting this hard point with ourselves.

And the other reason is, I think, yet plainer and more convincing: Because enemies will come of themselves, and let a man do what he can, he shall have some. Friendship is a thing that needs to be cultivated, if we would have it come to any thing; but enemies, like ill weeds, will spring up of themselves, without our care
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and toil. The enemy, as our Saviour calls the devil, will sow these *tares in the night*; and, when we least discern it, will scatter the seeds of discord and enmity among men; and will take an advantage, either from the envy or malice, or the mistakes of men, to make them enemies to one another: which would make one wonder to see what care and pains some men will take, to provoke mankind against them; how they will lay about them, and snatch at opportunities to make themselves enemies, as if they were afraid to let the happy occasion slip by them. But all this care and fear surely is needless. We may safely trust an ill-natured world, that we shall have enemies enough, without our doing things on our part to provoke and procure them.

But, above all, it concerns every man in prudence to take great care not to make personal enemies to himself: for these are the forest and the surest of all other, and, when there is an opportunity for it, will sit hardest upon us. Injuries done to the public are certainly the greatest; and yet they are many times more easily forgiven than those which are done to particular persons: for when revenge is every body's work, it may prove no body's. The general wrongs which are done to human society, do not so sensibly touch and sting men, as personal injuries and provocations. The law is never angry or in passion; and it is not only a great indecency, but a fault, when the judges of it are so. Heat of prosecution belongs to particular persons; and it is their memory of injuries, and desire to revenge them, and diligence to set on and sharpen the law, that is chiefly to be dreaded: and, if the truth were known, it is much to be feared, that there are almost as few private as public acts of oblivion passed in the world; and they commonly pass as slowly, and with as much difficulty, and not till the grace and good effect of them is almost quite lost.

II. If we ought to be thus affected towards our enemies, how great ought our kindness, and the expressions of it, to be to others? to those who never disobliged us, nor did us any injury by word or deed; to those more especially, who stand in a nearer relation to us; to our natural kindred, and to our spiritual brethren, to whom

whom we are so strongly linked and united by the common bond of Christianity; and, lastly, to our benefactors, and those who have been beforehand with us in obligation? for all these are so many special ties and endearments of men to one another, founded either in nature or religion, or in common justice and gratitude. And therefore, between all these and our enemies, we ought to make a very wide and sensible difference in our carriage and kindness towards them. And if we do not do so, we represent our Saviour as an unreasonable law-giver, and do perversely interpret this precept of his, contrary to the reasonable and equitable meaning of it. For whatever degree of kindness is here required towards our enemies, it is certain, that so much more is due to others, as, according to the true proportion of our tie and obligation to them, they have deserved at our hands; nothing being more certain, than that our blessed Saviour, the founder of our religion, did never intend by any precept of it to cancel any real obligation of nature, or justice, or gratitude, or to offer violence in the least to the common reason of mankind.

III. Hence we learn the excellency and the reasonableness of the Christian religion, which hath carried our duty so high in things which do so directly tend to the perfection of human nature, and to the peace of human society; and which, if all things be rightly considered, are most agreeable to the clearest and best reason of mankind: so that those things which were heretofore looked upon, and that only by some few of the wiser sort, as heroical instances of goodness, and above the common rate of humanity, are now by the Christian religion made the indispensable duties of all mankind. And the precepts of no other religion, that yet ever appeared in the world, have advanced human nature so much above itself, and are so well calculated for the peace and happiness of the world, as the precepts of the Christian religion are: for they strictly forbid the doing of injuries by way of prevention; and, in case they happen, they endeavour to put a present stop to the progress of them, by so severely forbidding the revenging of them.

And yet, after all this, it must be acknowledged to be a very untoward objection against the excellency and effi-

cacy of the Christian religion, that the practice of so many Christians is so unequal to the perfection of these precepts. For who is there in the changes and revolutions of human affairs, and when the wheel of providence turns them uppermost, and lays their enemies at their feet, that will give them any quarter? nay, that does not greedily seize upon the first opportunities of revenge, and, like an eagle hungry for his prey, make a sudden swoop upon them with all his force and violence; and, when he hath them in his pounces, and at his mercy, is not ready to tear them in pieces?

So that after all our boasts of the excellency of our religion, where is the practice of it? This, I confess, is a terrible objection indeed; and I must intreat of you, my brethren, to help me to the best answer to it: not by any nice distinctions and speculations about it, but by the careful and honest practice of this precept of our religion.

This was the old objection against philosophy, That many that were philosophers in their opinions, were faulty in their lives: but yet this was never thought by wise men to be a good objection against philosophy. And unless we will lay more weight upon the objections against religion, and press them harder than we think it reasonable to do in any other case, we must acknowledge likewise, that this objection against religion is of no force. Men do not cast off the art of physic, because many physicians do not live up to their own rules, and do not themselves follow those prescriptions which they think fit to give to others: and there is a plain reason for it, because their swerving from their own rules doth not necessarily signify, that their rules are not good, but only that their appetites are unruly, and too hard and headstrong for their reason; nothing being more certain than this, that rules may be very reasonable, and yet they that give them may not follow them.

IV. The fourth and last inference from this whole discourse shall be this, That, being convinced by what hath been said upon this argument of the reasonableness of this duty, we would resolve upon the practice of it, whenever there is occasion offered for it in the course of our lives. I need not to put you in mind, that there is
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now like to be great occasion for it; I shall only say, that whenever there is so, nothing can be tied more strictly upon us than this duty is.

It hath often been a great comfort and confirmation to me, to see the humanity of the Protestant religion, so plainly discovering itself, upon so many occasions, in the practice of the professors of it. And, setting aside all other advantages which our religion hath been evidently shewn to have above Popery in point of reason and argument, I cannot for my life but think that to be the best religion, which makes the best men, and, from the nature of its principles, is apt to make them so; most kind, and merciful, and charitable; and most free from malice, and revenge, and cruelty.

And therefore our blessed Saviour, who *knew what was in man* better than any man that ever was, knowing our great reluctance and backwardness to the practice of this duty, hath urged it upon us by such forcible, and almost violent arguments, that if we have any tenderness for ourselves, we cannot refuse obedience to it. For he plainly tells us, that no sacrifice that we can offer will appease God towards us, so long as we ourselves are implacable to men: ver. 23. of this chapter, *If thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee, leave thy gift before the altar, and go thy way: first go and be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.* To recommend this duty effectually to us, he gives it a preference to all the positive duties of religion: *First go and be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.* Till this duty be discharged, God will accept of no service, no sacrifice at our hands. And therefore our liturgy doth with great reason declare it to be a necessary qualification for our worthy receiving of the sacrament, that we be in love and charity with our neighbours; because this is a moral duty, and of eternal obligation, without which no positive part of religion, such as the sacraments are, can be acceptable to God; especially since, in this blessed sacrament of Christ's body and blood, we expect to have the forgiveness of our sins ratified and confirmed to us: which how can we hope for from God, if we ourselves be not ready to forgive one another?

He shall have judgement without mercy, says St James, who hath shewed no mercy. And in that excellent form of prayer which our Lord himself hath given us, he hath taught us so to ask forgiveness of God, as not to expect it from him, if we do not forgive one another. So that if we do not practise this duty, as hard as we think it is, every time that we put up this petition to God, *Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us,* we send up a terrible imprecation against ourselves, and do in effect beg of God not to forgive us. And therefore, to imprint this matter the deeper upon our minds, our blessed Saviour, immediately after the recital of this prayer, hath thought fit to add a very remarkable inforcement of this petition, above all the rest: *For if (says he) ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: but if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses,* Matth. vi. 14. 15.

And our Saviour hath likewise in his gospel represented to us, both the reasonableness of this duty, and the danger of doing contrary to it, in a very lively and affecting parable, delivered by him to this purpose, Matth. xviii. 23. concerning a wicked servant, who, when his lord had but just before forgiven him a vast debt of ten thousand talents, took his poor fellow-servant by the throat, and, notwithstanding his humble submission, and earnest entreaties to be favourable to him, haled him to prison for a trifling debt of an hundred pence. And the application which he makes of this parable, at the end of it, is very terrible, and such as ought never to go out of our minds: *So likewise (says he) shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye do not from your hearts forgive every one his brother his trespasses,* ver. 35. One might be apt to think at first view, that this parable was overdone, and wanted something of a due decorum; it being hardly credible, that a man, after he had been so mercifully and generously dealt withal, as upon his humble request to have so huge a debt so freely forgiven, should, whilst the memory of so much mercy was fresh upon him, even the very next moment, handle his fellow-servant, who had made the same humble submission

mission and request to him which he had done to his lord, with so much roughness and cruelty, for so inconsiderable a sum. This, I say, would hardly seem credible, did we not see in experience, how very unreasonable and unmerciful some men are, and with what confidence they can ask and expect great mercy from God, when they will shew none to men.

The greatness of the injuries which are done to us, is the reason commonly pleaded by us why we cannot forgive them. But whoever thou art that makest this an argument why thou canst not forgive thy brother, lay thine hand upon thine heart, and bethink thyself how many more, and much greater, offences thou hast been guilty of against God. Look up to that just and powerful being that is above, and consider well, whether thou dost not both expect and stand in need of more mercy and favour from him, than thou canst find in thine heart to shew to thine offending brother.

We have all certainly great reason to expect, that as we use one another, God will likewise deal with us. And yet after all this, how little is this duty practised among Christians? and how hardly are the best of us brought to love our enemies, and to forgive them? and this notwithstanding that all our hopes of mercy and forgiveness from God do depend upon it. How strangely inconsistent is our practice and our hope? and what a wide distance is there between our expectations from God, and our dealings with men? How very partial and unequal are we, to hope so easily to be forgiven, and yet to be so hard to forgive?

Would we have God, for Christ's sake, to forgive us those numberless and monstrous provocations which we have been guilty of against his divine Majesty; and shall we not, for his sake, for whose sake we ourselves are forgiven, be willing to forgive one another?

We think it hard to be obliged to forgive great injuries, and often repeated; and yet we be to us all, and most miserable shall we be to all eternity, if God do not all this to us, which we think to be so very hard and unreasonable for us to do to one another.

I have sometimes wondered how it should come to

pass, that so many persons should be so apt to despair of the mercy and forgiveness of God to them; especially considering what clear and express declarations God hath made of his readiness to forgive our greatest sins and provocations upon our sincere repentance: but the wonder will be very much abated, when we shall consider, with how much difficulty men are brought to remit great injuries, and how hardly we are persuaded to refrain from flying upon those who have given us any considerable provocation. So that, when men look into themselves, and shall carefully observe the motions of their own minds towards those against whom they have been justly exasperated, they will see but too much reason to think that forgiveness is no such easy matter.

But our comfort in this case is, that God is not as man; that *his ways are not as our ways, nor his thoughts as our thoughts*; but, *as the heavens are high about the earth, so are his ways above our ways, and his thoughts above our thoughts.*

And the best way to keep ourselves from despairing of God's mercy and forgiveness to us, is to be easy to grant forgiveness to others: and without this, as God hath reason to deny forgiveness to us, so we ourselves have all the reason in the world utterly to despair of it.

It would almost transport a Christian to read that admirable passage of the great Heathen Emperor and philosopher M. Aurelius Antoninus, l. 7. "Can the gods," says he, "that are immortal, for the continuance of so many ages, bear without impatience with such and so many sinners as have ever been; and not only so, but likewise take care of them, and provide for them, that they want nothing: and dost thou so grievously take on, as one that can bear with them no longer, thou that art but for a moment of time, yea thou that art one of those sinners thyself?"

I will conclude this whole discourse with those weighty and pungent sayings of the wise son of Sirach, Ecclesiasticus xxviii. 1. 2. 3. 4. *He that revengeth shall find vengeance from the Lord, and he will certainly retain his sins. Forgive thy neighbour that hath hurt thee, so shall thy sins also be forgiven when thou prayest. One man beareth hatred against another; and doth he seek pardon of the Lord?*

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He sheweth no mercy to a man like himself, and doth he ask forgiveness of his own sins?

Enable us, O Lord, by thy grace, to practise this excellent and difficult duty of our religion; and then, *Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us*, for thy mercies sake in Jesus Christ. To whom, with thee, O Father, and the Holy Ghost, be all honour and glory, adoration and obedience, both now and ever. *Amen.*

S E R M O N XXXIV.

The care of our souls, the one thing needful.

Preached before the King and Queen at Hampton-court,
April 14. 1689.

LUKE x. 42.

But one thing is needful.

IN the accounts of wise men, one of the first rules and measures of human actions is this, To regard every thing more or less, according to the degree of its consequence and importance to our happiness. That which is most necessary to that end, ought in all reason to be minded by us in the first place; and other things only so far as they are consistent with that great end, and subservient to it.

Our blessed Saviour here tells us, that there *is one thing needful*; that is, one thing which ought first and principally to be regarded by us: and what that is, it is of great concernment to us all to know, that we may mind and pursue it as it deserves.

And we may easily understand what it is, by considering the context, and the occasion of these words; which
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was briefly this. Our Saviour, as he went about preaching the kingdom of God, came into a certain village, where he was entertained at the house of two devout sisters. The elder, who had the care and management of the family, and the affairs of it, was employed in making entertainment for such a guest; the other sat at our Saviour's feet, attending to the doctrine of salvation which he preached.

The elder, finding herself not able to do all the business alone, desires of our Saviour that he would command her sister to come and help her. Upon this our Saviour gives her this gentle reprehension, *Martha, Martha, thou art careful, and troubled about many things: but one thing is needful.* And what that is, he declares in the next words, *And Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her;* that is, she hath chosen to take care of her salvation, which is infinitely more considerable than any thing else.

Our Saviour doth not altogether blame Martha for her respectful care of him; but commends her sister for her greater care of her soul; which made her either wholly to forget, or unwilling to mind other things at that time. So that, upon the whole matter, he highly approves her wise choice, in preferring an attentive regard to his doctrine, even before that which might be thought a necessary civility to his person.

From the words thus explained, the observation which I shall make is this:

That the care of religion and of our souls is *the one thing necessary*, and that which every man is concerned in the first place, and above all other things, to mind and regard.

This observation seems to be plainly contained in the text. I shall handle it as briefly as I can; and then, by way of application, shall endeavour to persuade you and myself to mind this *one thing necessary*.

And in speaking to this serious and weighty argument, I shall do these two things.

1. I shall endeavour to shew wherein this care of religion and of our souls does consist.

2. To convince men of the necessity of taking this care.

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First, I shall shew wherein this care of religion and of our souls doth consist. And this I shall endeavour to do with all the plainness I can, and so as every one that hears me may understand, and be sufficiently directed what is necessary for him to do in order to his eternal salvation.

And of this I shall give an account in the five following particulars, in which I think the main business of religion, and the due care of our souls, does consist.

1. In the distinct knowledge, and in the firm belief and persuasion of those things which are necessary to be known and believed by us in order to our eternal salvation.

2. In the frequent examination of our lives and actions, and in a sincere repentance for all the errors and miscarriages of them.

3. In the constant and daily exercise of piety and devotion.

4. In avoiding those things which are pernicious to our salvation, and whereby men do often hazard their souls.

5. In the even and constant practice of the several graces and virtues of a good life.

I. The due care of religion and our souls doth consist in the distinct knowledge, and in the firm belief and persuasion of those things which are necessary to be known and believed by us in order to our eternal salvation.

For this knowledge of the necessary principles and duties of religion, is the foundation of all good practice, wherein the life of religion doth consist. And without this no man can be truly religious. *Without faith* (saith the apostle to the Hebrews) *it is impossible to please God: for he that cometh to God, must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him*, Heb. xi.

6. Now, these two expressions of *pleasing God*, and *seeking him*, are plainly of the same importance, and do both of them signify *religion*, or the worship and service of God; which doth antecedently suppose our firm belief and persuasion of these two fundamental principles of all religion, That there is a God, and, That he will reward those that serve him: because, unless a man do first believe

lieve these, there would neither be ground nor encouragement for any such thing as religion.

And this knowledge of the necessary principles of religion our blessed Saviour calls *eternal life*, because it is so fundamentally necessary in order to our attaining of it: *This is life eternal*, (says he), *to know thee, the only true God, and him whom thou hast sent, Jesus Christ*, John xvii. 3. that is, to be rightly instructed in the knowledge of *the only true God*, and of *his Son Jesus Christ our Lord*. Under which two general heads are comprehended all the necessary principles both of the natural and of the Christian religion.

And, to the attaining of this knowledge, which is absolutely necessary to salvation, no such extraordinary pains and study is required, but only a teachable disposition, and a due application of mind. For whatever in religion is necessary to be known by all, must in all reason be plain and easy, and lie level to all capacities; otherwise we must say, that God, *who would have all men to be saved*, hath not provided for the salvation of all men. And therefore, now that the knowledge of the true God and the light of Christianity are spread abroad in the world, all that enjoy the gospel are, or may be, sufficiently instructed in all things necessary to their happiness: unless such care be used, as is in the church of Rome, to *take away the key of knowledge*, and to lock up the scriptures from the people in an unknown tongue; and this, as they pretend, upon a very charitable consideration, only it is to be hoped that it is not true, that the generality of mankind are mad, and have need to be kept in the dark. But, supposing men to be allowed those means of knowledge which God affords, and hath appointed for us, the great difficulty doth not commonly lie in mens understandings, but in their wills: only when men know these things, they must attend to them, and consider them, that the light which is in their understandings may warm their hearts, and have its due influence upon their lives.

II. The due care of our souls consists in the frequent examination of our lives and actions, and in a sincere repentance for all the errors and miscarriages of them; in a more particular and deep humiliation and repentance

ance for deliberate and wilful sins, so far as we can call them to our remembrance; and in a general repentance for sins of ignorance, and infirmity, and surprize: in the exercise whereof we are always to remember, that the nature of true repentance doth not consist only in an humble confession of our sins to God, and a hearty trouble and contrition for them; but chiefly in the stedfast purpose and resolution of a better life, and, in prosecution of this resolution, in actual reformation and amendment.

By the constant exercise hereof, we are put into a safe condition; provided that we persevere in this holy resolution and course. But if we still retain the love and practice of any known sin; or if, after we have taken up these good resolutions, we return again to an evil course, this is a clear evidence, either that our repentance was not sincere at first, or that we are relapsed into our former state: and then our souls are still in apparent danger of being lost, and will continue in that dangerous state, till we have renewed our repentance, and made it good in the following course of our lives.

III. The due care of our souls consists in the constant and daily exercise of piety and devotion, both in private and in public, if there be opportunity for it, especially at proper times, and upon more solemn occasions; by fervent prayer to God, and by hearing and reading the word of God with reverence and godly fear; by frequenting his public worship, and demeaning ourselves in it with that solemnity and seriousness which becomes the presence and service of the great and glorious majesty of God, who observes our behaviour, and sees into our hearts; and by receiving the blessed sacrament, as often as we have opportunity, with due preparation and devotion of mind.

For these are not only outward testimonies of our inward piety, but they are means likewise appointed by God to improve and confirm us in holiness and goodness. And whoever neglects these duties of religion, or performs them in a slight and superficial manner, doth plainly shew, that he hath neither a due sense of God, nor care of himself: for in vain does any man pretend that he does in good earnest design the end, when he neglects

neglects the best and most proper means for the attainment of it.

IV. The due care of our souls consists also in avoiding those things which are pernicious to our salvation, and whereby men do often hazard their souls. Such in general is the practice of any known sin. By this we do, as it were, run upon the sword's point, and do endanger our salvation as much as a deep wound in our body would do our life : and though such a wound may perhaps be cured afterwards by repentance ; yet no man that commits any wilful sin, knows the dismal consequence of it, and whither by degrees it may carry him at last : for, upon such a provocation, God may leave the sinner to himself, and withdraw his grace from him, and give him up to a hard and impenitent heart, to proceed from evil to worse, and from one wickedness to another, till he be finally ruined. So dangerous a thing is it knowingly to offend God, and to commit any deliberate act of sin.

More particularly, an inordinate love of the world is very pernicious to the souls of men ; because it quencheth the heavenly life, and fills our minds with earthly cares and designs : it tempts men to forsake God and religion when their worldly interests come in competition with them ; and betrays them to fraud, and falsehood, and all kind of injustice, and *many other hurtful lusts which drown the soul in perdition.*

But, besides these dangers which are more visible and apparent, there is another which is less discernible, because it hath the face of piety ; and that is, faction in religion ; by which I mean an unpeaceable and uncharitable zeal about things wherein religion, either doth not at all, or but very little consist : for besides that this temper is utterly inconsistent with several of the most eminent Christian graces and virtues, as humility, love, peace, meekness, and forbearance towards those that differ from us ; it hath likewise two very great mischiefs commonly attending upon it, and both of them pernicious to religion and the souls of men.

I. That it takes such men off from minding the more necessary and essential parts of religion. They are so zealous about small things, *the tithing of mint, and anise,*
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and cummins, that they neglect the weightier things of the law, faith, and mercy, and judgement, and the love of God. They spend so much of their time and heat about things doubtful, that they have no leisure to mind the things that are necessary; and are so concerned about little speculative opinions in religion, which they always call fundamental articles of faith, that the practice of religion is almost wholly neglected by them: and they are so taken up in spying out and censuring error and heresy in others, that they never think of curing those lusts, and vices, and passions, which do so visibly reign in themselves. Deluded people! that do not consider, that the greatest heresy in the world is a wicked life, because it is so directly and fundamentally opposite to the whole design of the Christian faith and religion; and that do not consider, that God will sooner forgive a man a hundred defects of his understanding, than one fault of his will.

2. Another great mischief which attends this temper, is, that men are very apt to interpret this zeal of theirs against others, to be great piety in themselves, and as much as is necessary to bring them to heaven; and to think that they are very religious, because they keep a great stir about maintaining the outworks of religion, when it is ready to be starved within; and that there needs no more to denominate them good Christians, but to be of such a party, and to be listed of such a church, which they always take for granted to be the only true one; and then zealously to hate, and uncharitably to censure, all the rest of mankind.

How many are there in the world, that think they have made very sure of heaven, not by the old plain way of leaving their sins, and reforming their lives, but by a more close and cunning way, of carrying their vices along with them into another church, and calling themselves good Catholics, and all others heretics? and that, having done this, they are in a safe condition? as if a mere name would admit a man into heaven, or as if there were any church in the world that had this fantastical privilege belonging to it, that a wicked man might be saved, for no other reason, but because he is of it.

Therefore, as thou valuest thy soul, take heed of en-

gaging in any faction in religion ; because it is an hundred to one, but thy zeal will be so employed about lesser things, that the main and substantial parts of religion will be neglected. Besides that a man deeply engaged in heats and controversies of this nature, shall very hardly escape being possessed with that spirit of uncharitableness and contention, of peevishness and fierceness, which reigns in all factions, but more especially in those of religion.

V. The due care of our souls consists in the even and constant practice of the several graces and virtues of a good life ; or, as the Apostle expresseth it, in *exercising ourselves always to have a conscience void of offence towards God and men*. For herein is religion best seen, in the equal and uniform practice of every part of our duty ; not only in serving God devoutly, but in demeaning ourselves peaceably and justly, kindly and charitably, towards all men ; not only in restraining ourselves from the outward act of sin, but in mortifying the inward inclination to it, in subduing our lusts, and governing our passions, and bridling our tongues. As he that would have a prudent care of his health and life, must not only guard himself against the chief and common diseases which are incident to men, and take care to prevent them ; but must likewise be careful to preserve himself from those which are esteemed less dangerous, but yet sometimes do prove mortal : he must not only endeavour to secure his head and heart from being wounded, but must have a tender care of every part : there being hardly any disease or wound so slight, but that some have died of it : In like manner, the care of our souls consists in an universal regard to our duty, and that we be defective in no part of it. Though we ought to have a more especial regard to those duties which are more considerable, and wherein religion doth mainly consist ; as, piety towards God, temperance and chastity in regard of ourselves, charity towards the poor, truth and justice, goodness and kindness towards all men : but then, no other grace and virtue, though of an inferior rank, ought to be neglected by us.

And thus I have endeavoured, as plainly and briefly as

as I could, to declare to you in what instances the due care of religion and our souls doth chiefly consist.

And I would not have any man think, that all this is an easy business, and requires but little time to do it in; and that a small degree of diligence and industry will serve for this purpose: to master and root out the inveterate habits of sin, to bring our passions under the command and government of our reason, and to attain to a good degree of every Christian grace and virtue; that faith, and hope, and charity, humility, and meekness, and patience, may all *have their perfect work*; and that, as St James says, we *may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing*; nothing that belongs to the perfection of a good man, and of a good Christian. And this, whenever we come to make the trial, we shall find to be a great and a long work.

Some indeed would make religion to be a very short and easy business, and to consist only in believing what Christ hath done for us, and relying confidently upon it: which is so far from being the true notion of Christian faith, that, if I be not much mistaken, it is the very definition of presumption. For the Bible plainly teacheth us, that, unless our faith *work by charity, and purify our hearts*, and reform our lives; unless, like Abraham's faith, it be *perfected by works*, it is but a *dead faith*, and will in no wise avail to our justification and salvation. And our blessed Saviour, the great *author and finisher of our faith*, hath no where, that I know of, said one word to this purpose, that faith separated from obedience and a good life will save any man: but he hath said very much to the contrary, and that very plainly. For he promisetb blessedness to none but those who live in the practice of those Christian graces and virtues which are particularly mentioned by him in the beginning of his excellent sermon upon the mount, Matth. v. 3. 4. &c. of humility, and repentance, and meekness, and righteousness, and mercifulness, and purity, and peaceableness, and patience under persecution, and sufferings for righteousness sake. And afterwards, in the same sermon, Matth. vii. 21. *Not every one* (saith he) *that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doth the will of my Father which is in heaven.* And again,

ver. 24. *Whofoever heareth thefe sayings of mine, and doth them, I will liken him unto a wife man, which built his houfe upon a rock.* And afterwards he tells us, ver. 26. 27. that whofoever builds his hopes of eternal happinefs upon any other foundation, than the faith of the gofpel, and the practice of its precepts, doth *build his houfe upon the fand*; which, when it comes to be tried by the rain, and the winds, will *fall*; and the fall of it will be great. And elfewhere, John xiii. 17. *If ye know thefe things, happy are ye if ye do them.* And he does very feverely check the vain confidence and prefumption of thofe who will needs rely upon him for falvation without keeping his commandments: *Why call ye me, (fays he) Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I fay?* Luke vi. 46.

Does any man think that he can be faved without loving God and Chrift? And this (faith St John) is the love of God, that we keep his commandments, 1 John v. 3. and again, 1 John ii. 4. *He that faith, I know him, and by the fame reason, he that faith, I love him, and keepeth not his commandments, he is a liar, and the truth is not in him.* John xiv. 15. *If ye love me, (faith our bleffed Lord), keep my commandments*; and again, ver. 21. *He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me.*

Does any man think, that any but the children of God fhall be heirs of eternal life? Hear then what St John faith, 1 John iii. 7. *Little children, let no man deceive you: he that doth righteousnefs, is righteous, even as he is righteous*; and again, ver. 10. *In this the children of God are manifef, and the children of the devil: he that doth not righteousnefs, is not of God.*

In a word, this is the perpetual tenor of the Bible, from the beginning of it to the end: Gen. iv. 7. *If thou doft well, (faith God to Cain), fhalt thou not be accepted?* And again, If. iii. 10. 11. *Say ye to the righteous, it fhall be well with him: for they fhall eat the fruit of their doings. Wo unto the wicked, it fhall be ill with him: for the reward of his hands fhall be given him.* And in the gofpel, when the young man came to our Saviour to be inftructed by him, *what good thing he fhould do that he might inherit eternal life?* our Lord gives him this fhort and plain advice, Matth. xix. 17. *If thou wilt enter into life,*

life, keep the commandments. And, in the very last chapter of the Bible, we find this solemn declaration, *Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and enter in through the gates into the city*; that is, into heaven, which the Apostle to the Hebrews calls the *city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God*. So vain and groundless is the imagination of those who trust to be saved by an idle and ineffectual faith, without holiness and obedience of life.

I proceed now, in the *second* place, to convince us all, if it may be, of the necessity of minding religion and our souls. When we call any thing necessary, we mean that it is so in order to some end, which cannot be attained without it. We call these things the necessities of life, without which men cannot subsist, and live in a tolerable condition in this world: and that is necessary to our eternal happiness, without which it cannot be attained.

Now, happiness being our chief end, whatever is necessary to that, is more necessary than any thing else; and, in comparison of that, all other things not only may, but ought to be neglected by us.

Now, to convince men of the necessity of religion, I shall briefly shew, that it is a certain way to happiness; that it is certain that there is no other way but this; and that, if we neglect religion, we shall certainly be extremely and for ever miserable.

1. That religion is a certain way to happiness. And for this we have God's express declaration and promise; the best assurance that can be. *He that cannot lie hath promised eternal life to them who, by patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory, and honour, and immortality*. All the happiness that we can desire, and of which the nature of man is capable, is promised to us upon the terms of religion; upon our *denying ungodliness, and worldly lusts, and living soberly, and righteously, and godly in this present world*: A mighty reward for a little service; an eternity of happiness, of joys unspeakable and full of glory, for the diligence and industry of a few days; a happiness large as our wishes, and lasting as our souls.

2. It is certain also, that there is no other way to happiness but this. He who alone can make us happy, hath

promised it to us upon these and no other terms. He hath said, that *if we live after the flesh, we shall die; but if by the Spirit we mortify the deeds of the flesh, we shall live*; that *without holiness no man shall see the Lord*; and that he that lives in the habitual practice of any vice, of *covetousness*, or *adultery*, or *malice*, or *revenge*, *shall not enter into the kingdom of God*. And we have reason to believe him concerning the terms of this happiness, and the means of attaining it, by whose favour and bounty alone we hope to be made partakers of it.

And if God had not said it in his word, yet the nature and reason of the thing doth plainly declare it: for religion is not only a condition of our happiness, but a necessary qualification and disposition for it. We must be like to God in the temper of our minds, before we can find any felicity in the enjoyment of him. Men must be purged from their lusts, and from those ill-natured and devilish passions, of malice, and envy, and revenge, before they can be fit company for their heavenly Father, and meet to dwell with him who is *love*, and dwells in *love*.

3. If we neglect religion, we shall certainly be extremely and for ever miserable. The word of truth hath said it, that *indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, shall be upon every soul of man that doth evil*. Nay, if God should hold his hand, and should inflict no positive torment upon sinners; yet they could not spare themselves, but would be their own executioners and tormentors. The guilt of that wicked life which they had led in this world, and the stings of their own consciences, must necessarily make them miserable, whenever their own thoughts are let loose upon them; as they will certainly be in the other world, when they shall have nothing either of pleasure or business to divert them.

So that if we be concerned, either to be happy hereafter, or to avoid those miseries which are great and dreadful beyond all imagination, it will be necessary for us to mind religion; without which we can neither attain that happiness, nor escape those miseries.

All that now remains is, to persuade you and myself seriously to mind this one thing necessary. And to this end I shall apply my discourse to two sorts of persons; those

those who are remiss in a matter of so great concernment; and those who are grossly careless, and mind it not at all.

1. To those who are remiss in a matter of such vast concernment; who mind the business of religion in some degree, but not so heartily and vigorously as a matter of such infinite consequence doth require and deserve.

And here I fear the very best are greatly defective; and so much the more to be blamed, by how much they are more convinced than others, of the necessity of a religious and holy life, and that without this no man shall ever be admitted into the mansions of the blessed. They believe likewise, that according to the degrees of every man's holiness and virtue in this life, will be the degrees of his happiness in the other; that *he that sows sparingly, shall reap sparingly; and he that sows plentifully, shall reap plentifully*: and that the measure of every man's reward shall be according to his improvement of the talents that were committed to him.

But how little do men live under the power of these convictions? And notwithstanding we are allured by the most glorious promises and hopes, and awed by the greatest fears, and urged by the most forcible argument in the world, the evident necessity of the thing; yet how faintly do we run the race that is set before us? How frequently and how easily are we stopped or diverted in our Christian course by very little temptations? How cold, and how careless, and how inconstant are we in the exercises of piety, and how defective in every part of our duty? Did we act reasonably, and as men use to do in matters of much less moment, we could not be so indifferent about a thing so necessary, so slight and careless in a matter of life and death, and upon which all eternity doth depend.

Let us then shake off this sloth and security, and resolve to make that the great business of time, which is our great concernment to all eternity: and when we are immersed in the cares and business of this life, and *troubled about many things*, let this thought often come into our minds, that there is *one thing needful*, and which therefore deserves above all other things to be regarded by us.

2. There

2. There are another sort of persons, who are grossly careless of this *one thing necessary*, and do not seem to mind it at all; who go on securely in an evil course, as if either they had no souls, or no concernment for them. I may say to these, as the master of the ship did to Jonah, when he was fast asleep in the storm, *What meanest thou, O sleeper? arise, and call upon thy God.* When our souls are every moment in danger of sinking, it is high time for us to awake out of sleep, to ply every oar, and to use all possible care and industry to save a thing so precious, from a danger so threatening and so terrible.

We are apt enough to be sensible of the force of this argument of necessity in other cases, and very carefully to provide against the pressing necessities of this life, and how to avoid those great temporal evils of poverty and disgrace, of pain and suffering: but the great necessity of all, and that which is mainly incumbent upon us, is, to provide for eternity; to secure the everlasting happiness, and to prevent the endless and unsupportable miseries of another world. This, this is the *one thing necessary*; and to this we ought to bend and apply all our care and endeavours.

If we would fairly compare the necessity of things, and wisely weigh the concernments of this life and the other in a just and equal balance, we should be ashamed to misplace our diligence and industry as we do; to bestow our best thoughts and time about these vain and perishing things, and to take no care about that *better part which cannot be taken from us.* Fond and vain men that we are, who are so solicitous how we shall pass a few days in this world, but matter not what shall become of us for ever.

But, as careless as we are now about these things, time will come when we shall sadly lay them to heart, and when they will touch us to the quick. When we come to lie upon a deathbed, if God shall be pleased to grant us then so much time and use of our reason, as to be able to recollect ourselves, we shall then be convinced how great a necessity there was of minding our souls, and of the prodigious folly of neglecting them, and of our not being sensible of the value of them, till we are ready to despair of saving them.

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But, blessed be God, this is not yet our case, though we know not how soon it may be. Let us then be wise, and consider these things in time, lest death and despair should overtake and oppress us at once.

You that are young, be pleased to consider, that this is the best opportunity of your lives, for the minding and doing of this work. You are now most capable of the best impressions, before the habits of vice have taken deep root, and your hearts *be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. This is the acceptable time; this is the day of salvation.*

And there is likewise a very weighty consideration to be urged upon those that are old, if there be any that are willing to own themselves so, that this is the last opportunity of their lives; and therefore they should lay hold of it, and improve it with all their might: for it will soon be past; and when it is, nothing can call it back.

It is but a very little while before we shall all certainly be of this mind, that the best thing we could have done in this world, was to prepare for the other. Could I represent to you that invisible world which I am speaking of, you would all readily assent to this counsel, and would be glad to follow it, and put it speedily in practice. Do but then open your eyes, and look a little before you to the things which are not far off from any of us, and to many of us may perhaps be much nearer than we are aware. Let us but judge of things now, as we shall all shortly judge of them: and let us live now, as after a few days we shall every one of us wish with all our souls that we had lived; and be as serious, as if we were ready to step into the other world, and to enter upon that change, which death will quickly make in every one of us. Strange stupidity of men! that a change, so near, so great, so certain, should affect us so coldly, and be so little considered and provided for by us: that the things of time should move us so much, and the things of eternity so little. What will we do when this change comes, if we have made no preparation for it?

If we be Christians, and do verily believe the things which I am speaking of, and that, after a few days more are passed, death will come, and draw aside that thick veil of sense and security, which now hides these things from

from us; and shew us that fearful and amazing sight, which we are now so loth to think upon: I say, if we believe this, it is time for us to be wise and serious.

And happy that man, who, in the days of his health, hath retired himself from the noise and tumult of this world, and made that careful preparation for death and a better life, as may give him that constancy and firmness of spirit, as to be able to bear the thoughts and approaches of his great change without amazement; and to have a mind almost equally poized between that strong inclination of nature, which makes us desirous to live, and that wiser dictate of reason and religion, which should make us willing and contented to die whenever God thinks fit.

Many of us do not now so clearly discern these things, because our eyes are dazzled with the false light and splendour of earthly felicity: but this assuredly is more worth than all *the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them*, to be able to possess our souls at such a time, and to be at perfect peace with our own minds, having *our hearts fixed, trusting in God*; to have our accounts made up, and estate of our immortal souls as well settled and secured, as, by the assistance of God's grace, human care and endeavour, though mixed with much human frailty, is able to do.

And if we be convinced of these things, we are utterly inexcusable, if we do not make this our first and great care, and prefer it to all other interests whatsoever. And to this end, we should resolutely disintangle ourselves from worldly cares and incumbrances; at least so far, that we may have competent liberty and leisure to attend this great concernment, and to put our souls into a fit posture and preparation for another world: that when sickness and death shall come, we may not act our last part indecently and confusedly, and have a great deal of work to do, when we shall want both time and all other advantages to do it in; whereby our souls, when they will stand most in need of comfort and support, will unavoidably be left in a trembling and disconsolate condition, and in an anxious doubtfulness of mind, what will become of them for ever.

To conclude: This care of religion and our souls is a
thing

thing so necessary, that, in comparifon of it, we are to neglect the very necessaries of life. So our Lord teacheth us, Matth. vi. 31. 33. *Take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or what shall we drink? or wherewithal shall we be clothed? But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness.* The calls of God and religion are so very pressing and importunate, that they admit of no delay or excuse whatsoever. This our Saviour signifies to us, by denying the disciple, whom he had called to follow him, leave to go and bury his father; *Let the dead* (says he) *bury their dead; but do thou follow me.*

There is *one thing needful*, and that is the business of religion, and the care of our immortal souls; which, whatever else we neglect, should be carefully minded and regarded by every one of us. *O that there were such a heart in us! O that we were wise, that we understood this, that we would consider our latter end!* Which God grant we may all do, *in this our day*, for his mercies sake, in Jesus Christ. To whom, with the Father, and the Holy Ghost, be all honour and glory, now and ever. *Amen.*

S E R M O N XXXV.

Of the eternity of hell-torments.

Preached before the Queen, at Whitehall, Mar. 7. 1689-90.

MATTH. XXV. 46.

And these shall go away into everlasting punishment; but the righteous into life eternal.

AMong all the arguments to repentance and a good life, those have the greatest force and power upon the minds of men, which are fetched from another world, and from the final state of good and bad men after this life.

life. And this our Saviour represents to us in a most lively manner, in that prospect which, in the latter part of this chapter, he gives us of the judgement of the great day; namely, that at the end of the world, *the Son of man shall come in his glory, with his holy angels, and shall sit upon the throne of his glory; and all nations shall be gathered before him, and shall be separated into two great companies, the righteous and the wicked; who shall stand, the one on the right hand, and the other on the left, of this great judge; who shall pronounce sentence severally upon them, according to the actions which they have done in this life. The righteous shall be rewarded with eternal happiness, and the wicked shall be sentenced to everlasting punishment. And these, that is, the wicked, shall go away into everlasting punishment; but the righteous into life eternal.*

The words are plain, and need no explication. For I take it for granted, that every one, at first hearing of them, does clearly apprehend the difference between the *righteous* and the *wicked*, and between endless happiness and misery. But although these words be so very easy to be understood, they can never be too much considered by us. The scope and design of them is, to represent to us the different fates of good and bad men in another world, and that their ends there will be as different as their ways and doings have been here in this world. The serious consideration whereof, is the greatest discouragement to sin, and the most powerful argument in the world to a holy and virtuous life; because it is an argument taken from our greatest and most lasting interest, our happiness, or our misery, to all eternity: a concernment of that vast consequence, that it must be the greatest stupidity and folly in the world for any man to neglect it.

This eternal state of rewards and punishments in another world, our blessed Saviour hath clearly revealed to us. And as to one part of it, *viz.* that good men shall be eternally happy in another world, every one gladly admits it: but many are loth that the other part should be true, concerning the eternal punishment of wicked men. And therefore they pretend, that it is contrary to the justice of God, to punish temporary crimes with
eternal

eternal torments; because justice always observes a proportion between offences and punishments; but between temporary sins and eternal punishments, there is no proportion. And as this seems hard to be reconciled with justice, so much more with that excess of goodness which we suppose to be in God.

And therefore they say, that though God seem to have declared, that impenitent sinners shall be everlastingly punished; yet these declarations of scripture are so to be mollified and understood, as that we may be able to reconcile them with the essential perfections of the divine nature.

This is the full force and strength of the objection. And my work at this time shall be to clear, if I can, this difficult point: and that for these two reasons. 1. For the vindication of the divine justice and goodness: *That God may be justified in his sayings, and appear righteous when he judgeth.* And, 2. Because the belief of the threatenings of God, in their utmost extent, is of so great moment to a good life, and so great a discouragement to sin: for the sting of sin is the terror of eternal punishment; and if men were once set free from the fear and belief of this, the most powerful restraint from sin would be taken away.

So that, in answer to this objection, I shall endeavour to prove these two things.

1. That the eternal punishment of wicked men in another world is plainly threatened in scripture.

2. That this is not inconsistent either with the justice or the goodness of God.

First, That the eternal punishment of wicked men in another world is plainly threatened in scripture, namely, in these following texts: Matth. xviii. 8. *It is better for thee to enter into life halt and maimed, than having two hands or two feet, to be cast into everlasting fire;* and, Matth. xxv. 41. *Depart, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels.* And here, in the text, *These*; that is, the wicked, *shall go away into everlasting punishment.* And Mark ix. it is there three several times, with great vehemency, repeated by our Saviour, *Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched:* and, 2 Thess. i. 9. speaking of them that

know not God, and obey not the gospel of his Son, it is said of them, who shall be punished with everlasting destruction.

I know very well, that great endeavour hath been used to avoid the force of these texts, by shewing, that the words *for ever* and *everlasting* are frequently used in scripture in a more limited sense, only for a long duration and continuance. Thus *for ever* doth very often in the Old Testament only signify for a long time, and till the end of the Jewish dispensation. And in the epistle of St Jude, ver. 7. the cities of Sodom and Gomorrha are said to be *set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire*; that is, of a fire that was not extinguished till those cities were utterly consumed.

And therefore, to clear the meaning of the aforementioned texts, 1. I shall readily grant, that the words *for ever* and *everlasting* do not always in scripture signify an endless duration; and that this is sufficiently proved by the instances alledged to this purpose. But then, 2. It cannot be denied, on the other hand, that these words are often in scripture used in a larger sense, and so as necessarily to signify an interminable and endless duration: as, where eternity is attributed to God, and he is said to *live for ever and ever*; and where eternal happiness in another world is promised to good men, and that *they shall be for ever with the Lord*. Now, the very same words and expressions are used concerning the punishment of wicked men in another life. And there is great reason why we should understand them in the same extent; both because, if God had intended to have told us, that the punishment of wicked men shall have no end, the languages wherein the scriptures are written do hardly afford fuller and more certain words, than those that are used in this case, whereby to express to us a duration without end; and likewise, which is almost a peremptory decision of the thing, because the duration of the punishment of wicked men is, in the very same sentence, expressed by the very same word which is used for the duration of the happiness of the righteous; as is evident from the text: *These, speaking of the wicked, shall go away, εἰς κόλασιν αἰώνιον, into eternal punishment;*
but

but the righteous, εἰς ζωὴν αἰώνιον, into life eternal. I proceed to the

Second thing I proposed, namely, to shew, that this is not inconsistent either with the justice or the goodness of God : for in this the force of the objection lies. And it hath been attempted to be answered several ways ; none of which seems to me to give clear and full satisfaction to it.

I. It is said by some, That because sin is infinite, in respect of the object against whom it is committed, which is God, therefore it deserves an infinite punishment.

But this I doubt will, upon examination, be found to have more of subtilty than of solidity in it. It is true indeed, that the dignity of the person against whom any offence is committed, is a great aggravation of the fault : for which reason all offences against God are certainly the greatest of all other : But that crimes should hereby be heightened to an infinite degree, can by no means be admitted ; and that for this plain reason, Because then the evil and demerit of all sins must necessarily be equal ; for the demerit of no sin can be more than infinite : and if the demerit of all sins be equal, there can then be no reason for the degrees of punishment in another world. But, to deny that there are degrees of punishment there, is not only contrary to reason, but to our Saviour's express assertion, that some shall be *beaten with many stripes*, and some with fewer ; and that it shall be *more tolerable for some in the day of judgement*, than for others. Besides, that by the same reason that the least sin that is committed against God may be said to be infinite because of its object, the least punishment that is inflicted by God may be said to be infinite because of its author ; and then all punishments from God, as well as all sins against him, would be equal ; which is palpably absurd. So that this answer is by no means sufficient to break the force of this objection.

II. It is said by others, That if wicked men lived for ever in this world, they would sin for ever ; and therefore they deserve to be punished for ever. But this hath neither truth nor reason enough in it to give satisfaction. For who can certainly tell, that if a man lived never so long, he would never repent and grow better ?

Besides, that the justice of God doth only punish the

sins which men have committed in this life, and not those which they might possibly have committed if they had lived longer.

III. It is said, in the last place, That God hath set before men everlasting happiness and misery, and the sinner hath his choice. Here are two things said, which seem to bid fairly towards an answer.

1. That the reward which God promiseth to our obedience, is equal to the punishment which he threatens to our disobedience: but yet this I doubt will not reach the business: because though it be not contrary to justice, to exceed in rewards, that being matter of mere favour; yet it may be so, to exceed in punishments.

2. It is further said, that the sinner in this case hath nothing to complain of, since he hath his own choice. This, I confess, is enough to silence the sinner, and to make him to acknowledge that his destruction is of himself: but yet, for all that, it does not seem so clearly to satisfy the objection from the disproportion between the fault and the punishment.

And therefore I shall endeavour to clear, if it may be, this matter yet a little further, by these following considerations.

I. Let it be considered, that the measure of penalties with respect to crimes is not only nor always to be taken from the quality and degree of the offence, much less from the duration and continuance of it; but from the ends and reasons of government; which requires such penalties as may, if it be possible, secure the observation of the law, and deter men from the breach of it. And the reason of this is evident; because if it were once declared, that no man should suffer longer for any crime than according to the proportion of the time in which it was committed, the consequence of this would be, that sinners would be better husbands of their time, and sin so much the faster, that they might have the greater bargain of it, and might satisfy for their sins by a shorter punishment.

And it would be unreasonable likewise upon another account; because some of the greatest sins may perhaps be committed in the shortest time: for instance, murder; the act whereof may be over in a moment, but the effects

effects of it are perpetual : for he that kills a man once, kills him for ever. The act of murder may be committed in a trice, but the injury is endless and irreparable. So that this objection of temporary crimes being punished with so much longer sufferings, is plainly of no force.

Besides, that whoever considers how ineffectual the threatening even of eternal torments is to the greatest part of sinners, will soon be satisfied, that a less penalty than that of eternal sufferings would, to the far greatest part of mankind, have been in all probability of little or no force. And therefore, if any thing more terrible than eternal vengeance could have been threatened to the workers of iniquity, it had not been unreasonable ; because it would all have been little enough to deter men effectually from sin.

So that what proportion crimes and penalties ought to bear to each other, is not so properly a consideration of justice, as of wisdom and prudence in the lawgiver.

And the reason of this seems very plain ; because the measure of penalties is not taken from any strict proportion betwixt crimes and punishments, but from one great end and design of government, which is, to secure the observation of wholesome and necessary laws ; and consequently, whatever penalties are proper and necessary to this end, are not unjust.

And this consideration I desire may be more especially observed, because it strikes at the very foundation of the objection. For if the appointing and apportioning of penalties to crimes be not so properly a consideration of justice, but rather of prudence in the lawgivers ; then, whatever the disproportion may be between temporary sins and eternal sufferings, justice cannot be said to be concerned in it.

Justice indeed is concerned, that the righteous and the wicked should not be treated alike ; and farther yet, that greater sins should have a heavier punishment, and that mighty sinners should be mightily tormented. But all this may be considered and adjusted in the degree and the intenseness of the suffering, without making any difference in the duration of it.

The case then in short stands thus : Whenever we break the laws of God, we fall into his hands, and lie

at his mercy, and he may without injustice inflict what punishment upon us he pleaseth; and consequently, to secure his law from violation, he may beforehand threaten what penalties he thinks fit and necessary to deter men from the transgression of it. And this is not esteemed unjust among men, to punish crimes that are committed in an instant, with the perpetual loss of estate, or liberty, or life.

II. This will yet appear more reasonable, when we consider, that, after all, he that threatens, hath still the power of execution in his own hands. For there is this remarkable difference between promises and threatenings, that he who promiseth, passeth over a right to another, and thereby stands obliged to him in justice and faithfulness to make good his promise; and if he do not, the party to whom the promise is made, is not only disappointed, but injuriously dealt withal. But in threatenings it is quite otherwise. He that threatens, keeps the right of punishing in his own hand, and is not obliged to execute what he hath threatened, any further than the reasons and ends of government do require; and he may, without any injury to the party threatened, remit and abate as much as he pleaseth of the punishment that he hath threatened; and because in so doing he is not worse, but better than his word, no body can find fault, or complain of any wrong or injustice thereby done to him.

Nor is this any impeachment of God's truth and faithfulness, any more than it is esteemed among men a piece of falsehood, not to do what they have threatened. God did absolutely threaten the destruction of the city of Nineveh; and his peevish prophet did understand the threatening to be absolute, and was very angry with God for employing him in a message that was not made good. But God understood his own right, and did what he pleased, notwithstanding the threatening he had denounced; and for all Jonah was so touched in honour, that he had rather have died himself, than that Nineveh should not have been destroyed, only to have verified his message.

I know it is said in this case, that God hath confirmed these threatenings by an oath, which is a certain sign
of

of the immutability of his counsel; and therefore his truth is concerned in the strict and rigorous execution of them. The land of Canaan was a type of heaven; and the Israelites who rebelled in the wilderness, were also a type of impenitent sinners under the gospel; consequently the oath of God concerning the rebellious Israelites, when *he swore in his wrath, that they should not enter into his rest*, that is, into the land of Canaan, doth equally oblige him to execute his threatening upon all impenitent sinners under the gospel, that they shall never enter into the kingdom of God. And this is very truly reasoned, so far as the threatening extends; which, if we attend to the plain words of it, beyond which threatenings are never to be stretched, doth not seem to reach any further than to the exclusion of impenitent sinners out of heaven, and their falling finally short of the rest and happiness of the righteous. Which, however, directly overthrows the opinion ascribed to Origen, That the devils and wicked men shall all be saved at last; God having *sworn in his wrath, that they shall never enter into his rest*.

But then, as to the eternal misery and punishment threatened to wicked men in the other world, though it be not necessarily comprehended in this oath, that they *shall not enter into his rest*; yet we are to consider, that both the tenor of the sentence which our blessed Saviour hath assured us will be passed upon them at the judgment of the great day, *Depart, ye cursed, into everlasting fire*; and likewise this declaration in the text, that *the wicked shall go away into everlasting punishment*, though they do not restrain God from doing what he pleases, yet they cut off from the sinner all reasonable hopes of the relaxation or mitigation of them: for since the great judge of the world hath made so plain and express a declaration, and will certainly pass such a sentence, it would be the greatest folly and madness in the world, for the sinner to entertain any hope of escaping it, and to venture his soul upon that hope.

I know but one thing more, commonly said upon this argument, that seems material; and that is this, That the words *death*, and *destruction*, and *perishing*, whereby the punishment of wicked men in the other world is most frequently

quently expressed in scripture, do most properly import annihilation, and an utter end of being; and therefore may reasonably be so understood in the matter of which we are now speaking.

To this I answer, That these words, and those which answer them in other languages, are often, both in scripture and other authors, used to signify a state of great misery and suffering, without the utter extinction of the miserable. Thus God is often in scripture said to bring destruction upon a nation when he sends great judgements upon them, though they do not exterminate and make an utter end of them.

And nothing is more common in most languages, than by *perishing* to express a person's being undone, and made very miserable; as in that known passage in Tiberius's letter to the Roman senate: *Ita me dii deaque omnes pejus perdant, quam hodie perire me sentio*, &c. "Let all the gods and goddesses (saith he) destroy me worse, than at this very time I feel myself to perish," &c. In which saying, the words *destroy* and *perish* are both of them used to express the miserable anguish and torment which at that time he felt in his mind, as Tacitus tells us at large.

And as for the word *death*; a state of misery, which is as bad or worse than death, may properly enough be called by that name: and, for this reason, the punishment of wicked men after the day of judgement is, in the book of the revelation, so frequently and fitly called *the second death*. And *the lake of fire*, Rev. xx. 14. into which the wicked shall be cast, to be tormented in it, is expressly called *the second death*.

But besides this, they that argue from the force of these words, that the punishment of wicked men in the other world shall be nothing else but an utter end of their being, do necessarily fall into two great inconveniencies.

I. That hereby they exclude all positive punishment and torment of sinners. For if *the second death*, and to be *destroyed*, and to *perish*, signify nothing else but the annihilation of sinners, and an utter extinction of their being; and if this be all the effect of that dreadful sentence which shall be passed upon them at the day of judgement,

judgement, then the fire of hell is quenched all at once, and is only a frightful metaphor without any meaning. But this is directly contrary to the tenor of scripture, which doth so often describe the punishment of wicked men in hell by positive torments: and particularly our blessed Saviour, describing the lamentable state of the damned in hell, expressly says, that *there shall be weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth*; which cannot be, if annihilation be all the meaning and effect of the sentence of the great day.

2. Another inconvenience of this opinion is, that if annihilation be all the punishment of sinners in the other world, then the punishment of all sinners must of necessity be equal, because there are no degrees of annihilation or not being. But this also is most directly contrary to scripture, as I have already shewn.

I know very well, that some who are of this opinion, do allow a very long and tedious time of the most terrible and intolerable torment of sinners; and after that, they believe, that there shall be an utter end of their being.

But then they must not argue this from the force of the words before mentioned; because the plain inference from thence is, that annihilation is all the punishment that wicked men shall undergo in the next life: and if that be not true, as I have plainly shewn that it is not, I do not see from what other words or expressions in scripture they can find the least ground for this opinion, that the torment of wicked men shall at last end in their annihilation. And yet admitting all this, for which I think there is no ground at all in scripture, I cannot see what great comfort sinners take in the thought of a tedious time of terrible torment, ending at last in annihilation, and the utter extinction of their beings.

3. We may consider further, that the primary end of all threatenings is not punishment, but the prevention of it: for God does not threaten, that men may sin, and be punished; but that they may not sin, and so may escape the punishment threatened. And therefore the higher the threatening runs, so much the more mercy and goodness there is in it; because it is so much the
more

more likely to hinder men from incurring the penalty that is threatened.

4. Let it be considered likewise, that when it is so very plain that God hath threatened eternal misery to impenitent sinners, all the prudence in the world obliges men to believe that he is in good earnest, and will execute these threatenings upon them, if they will obstinately stand it out with him, and will not be brought to repentance. And therefore, in all reason, we ought so to demean ourselves, and so to persuade others, as knowing the terror of the Lord, and that they who wilfully break his laws are in danger of eternal death. To which I will add, in the

5. And last place, That if we suppose, that God did intend that his threatenings should have their effect to deter men from the breach of his laws, it cannot be imagined, that in the same revelation which declares these threatenings, any intimation should be given of the abatement or non-execution of them. For by this God would have weakened his own laws, and have taken off the edge and terror of his threatenings; because a threatening hath quite lost its force, if we once come to believe that it will not be executed: and consequently it would be a very impious design to go about to teach or persuade any thing to the contrary, and a betraying men into that misery, which, had it been firmly believed, might have been avoided.

We are all bound to preach, and you and I are all bound to believe the terrors of the Lord. Not so as saucily to determine and pronounce what God must do in this case; for after all, he may do what he will, as I have clearly shewn: but what is fit for us to do, and what we have reason to expect, if, notwithstanding a plain and express threatening of *the vengeance of eternal fire*, we still go on *to treasure up to ourselves wrath against the day of wrath, and the revelation of the righteous judgment of God*; and will desperately put it to the hazard, whether, and how far, God will execute his threatenings upon sinners in another world.

And therefore there is no need why we should be very solicitously concerned for the honour of God's justice or goodness in this matter. Let us but take care to believe
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and avoid the threatenings of God ; and then how terrible soever they are, no harm can come to us. And as for God, let us not doubt but that he will take care of his own honour ; and that he, *who is holy in all his ways, and righteous in all his works*, will do nothing that is repugnant to his eternal goodness and righteousness ; and that he will certainly so manage things at the judgment of the great day, *as to be justified in his sayings, and to be righteous when we are judged*. For, notwithstanding his threatenings, he hath reserved power enough in his own hands to do right to all his perfections ; so that we may rest assured, that he will *judge the world in righteousness* : and if it be any ways inconsistent either with righteousness or goodness, which he knows much better than we do, to make sinners miserable for ever, that he will not do it ; nor is it credible, that he would threaten sinners with a punishment which he could not justly execute upon them.

Therefore sinners ought always to be afraid of it, and reckon upon it ; and always to remember, that there is great goodness and mercy in the severity of God's threatenings ; and that nothing will more justify the infliction of eternal torments, than the foolish presumption of sinners in venturing upon them, notwithstanding such plain and terrible threatenings.

This, I am sure, is a good argument to all of us, to *work out our salvation with fear and trembling* ; and, with all possible care, to endeavour the prevention of that misery which is so terribly severe, that at present we can hardly tell how to reconcile it with the justice and goodness of God.

This God heartily desires we would do ; and hath solemnly sworn, that *he hath no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that he should turn from his wickedness, and live*. So that here is all imaginable care taken to prevent our miscarriage, and all the assurance that the God of truth can give us of his unwillingness to bring this misery upon us. And both these, I am sure, are arguments of great goodness. For what can goodness do more than to warn us of this misery, and earnestly to persuade us to prevent it ; and to threaten us so very terribly, on purpose to deter us from so great a danger ?

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And if this will not prevail with us, but we will still go on to *despise the riches of God's goodness, and long-suffering, and forbearance*; what in reason remains for us, but a *fearful looking for of judgement, and fiery indignation to consume us*? And what almost can justice, or even goodness itself, do less, than to inflict that punishment upon us, which with eyes open we would wilfully run upon; and which no warning, no persuasion, no importunity, could prevail with us to avoid? and when, as the Apostle says, *knowing the judgement of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death*, yet for all that we would venture to commit them.

And therefore, whatever we suffer, we do but inherit our own choice, and have no reason to complain of God, who hath set before us life and death, eternal happiness and misery, and hath left us to be the carvers of our own fortune: and if, after all this, we will obstinately refuse this happiness, and wilfully run upon this misery, *wo unto us! for we have rewarded evil to ourselves.*

You see then, by all that hath been said upon this argument, what we have all reason to expect, if we will still go on in our sins, and will not be brought to repentance. You have heard, what a terrible punishment the just God hath threatened to the workers of iniquity; and that in as plain words as can be used to express any thing: *These, that is, the wicked, shall go away into everlasting punishment; but the righteous into life eternal.*

Here are life and death, happiness and misery, set before us. Not this frail and mortal life, which is hardly worth the having, were it not in order to a better and happier life; nor a temporal death, to get above the dread whereof should not, methinks, be difficult to us, were it not for the bitter and terrible consequences of it: but an eternal life, and an eternal enjoyment of all things which can render life pleasant and happy; and a perpetual death, which will for ever torment us, but never make an end of us.

These God propounds to our choice: and if the consideration of them will not prevail with us to leave our sins, and to reform our lives, what will? Weightier motives cannot be proposed to the understanding of man, than everlasting punishment, and life eternal; than the
greatest

greatest and most durable happiness, and the most intolerable and lasting misery that human nature is capable of.

Now, considering in what terms the threatenings of the gospel are expressed, we have all the reason in the world to believe, that the punishment of sinners in another world will be everlasting. However, we cannot be certain of the contrary time enough to prevent it; not till we come there, and find it by experience how it is: and if it prove so, it will then be too late either to prevent that terrible doom, or to get it reversed.

Some comfort themselves with the uncomfortable and uncertain hope of being discharged out of being, and reduced to their first nothing; at least after the tedious and terrible suffering of the most grievous and exquisite torments for innumerable ages. And if this should happen to be true, good God! how feeble, how cold a comfort is this? Where is the reason and understanding of men, to make this their last refuge and hope; and to lean upon it as a matter of mighty consolation, that they shall be miserable beyond all imagination, and beyond all patience, for God knows how many ages? *Have all the workers of iniquity no knowledge?* no right sense and judgement of things? no consideration, and care of themselves? no concernment for their own lasting interest and happiness?

Origen, I know not for what good reason, is said to have been of opinion, that the punishment of devils and wicked men, after the day of judgement, will continue but for a thousand years; and that after that time they shall all be finally saved. I can very hardly persuade myself, that so wise and learned a man as Origen was, should be positive in an opinion for which there can be no certain ground in reason, especially for the punctual and precise term of a thousand years; and for which there is no ground at all, that I know of, from divine revelation.

But upon the whole matter, however it be, be it for a thousand years, or be it for a longer and unknown term, or be it for ever, which is plainly threatened in the gospel; I say, however it be, this is certain, that it is infinitely wiser to take care to avoid it, than to dispute it, and to run the final hazard of it. Put it which way

we will, especially if we put it at the worst, as in all prudence we ought to do, it is by all possible means to be provided against: so terrible, so intolerable, is the thought, yea the very least suspicion, of being miserable for ever.

And now give me leave to ask you, as St Paul did King Agrippa, *Do you believe the scriptures?* And I hope I may answer for you myself, as he did for Agrippa, *I know you do believe them.* And in them these things are clearly revealed, and are part of that creed of which we make a solemn profession every day.

And yet, when we consider how most men live, is it credible that they do firmly believe this plain declaration of our Saviour and our judge, that *the wicked shall go into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal?*

Or if they do in some sort believe it, is it credible that they do at all consider it seriously, and lay it to heart? So that, if we have a mind to reconcile our belief with our actions, we must either alter our Bible and our creed, or we must change our lives.

Let us then *consider, and shew ourselves men*: and if we do so, can any man, to please himself for a little while, be contented to be punished for ever; and, for the shadow of a short and imperfect happiness in this life, be willing to run the hazard of being really and eternally miserable in the next world?

Surely this consideration alone, of the extreme and endless misery of impenitent sinners in another world, if it were but well wrought into our minds, would be sufficient to kill all the temptations of this world, and to lay them dead at our feet; and to make us deaf to all the enchantments of sin and vice: because they bid us so infinitely to our loss, when they offer us the enjoyment of a short pleasure, upon so very hard and unequal a condition as that of being miserable for ever.

The eternal rewards and punishments of another life, which are the great sanction and security of God's laws, one would think, should be a sufficient weight to cast the scales against any pleasure, or any pain, that this world can tempt or can threaten us withal.

And yet, after all this, will we still go on to do wickedly

kedly, when *we know the terrors of the Lord*, and that we must one day answer all our bold violations of his law, and contempts of his authority, with the loss of our immortal souls, and by *suffering the vengeance of eternal fire*?

What is it then that can give men the heart and courage (but I recal that word, because it is not true courage, but fool-hardiness) thus to outbrave the judgement of God, and to set at nought the horrible and amazing consideration of a miserable eternity? How is it possible that men that are awake, and in their wits, should have any ease in their minds, or enjoy so much as one quiet hour, whilst so great a danger hangs over their heads, and they have taken no tolerable care to prevent it? If we have any true and just sense of this danger, we cannot fail to shew that we have it, by making haste to escape it, and by taking that care of our souls which is due to immortal spirits, that are made to be happy or miserable to all eternity.

Let us not therefore estimate or measure things as they appear now to our sensual, and deluded, and depraved judgements; but let us open our eyes, and look to the last issue and consequence of them: let us often think of these things, and consider well with ourselves, what apprehensions will then probably fill and possess our minds, when we shall stand trembling before our judge, in a fearful expectation of that terrible sentence which is just ready to be pronounced, and, as soon as ever it is pronounced, to be executed upon us; when we shall have a full and clear sight of the unspeakable happiness, and of the horrible and astonishing miseries, of another world; when there shall be no longer any veil of flesh and sense to interpose between them and us, and to hide these things from our eyes; and, in a word, when heaven, with all the glories of it, shall be open to our view; and, as the expression is in Job, *Hell shall be naked before us, and destruction shall have no covering*.

How shall we then be confounded, to find the truth and reality of those things which we will not now be persuaded to believe? and how shall we then wish, that we had believed *the terrors of the Lord*; and instead of quarrelling with the principles of religion, and calling

them into question, we had lived under the constant sense and awe of them.

Blessed be God that there is yet *hope concerning us*; and that we may yet *flee from the wrath to come*; and that the miseries of eternity may yet be prevented in time; and that for this very end and purpose, our most gracious and merciful God has so clearly revealed these things to us, not with a desire to bring them upon us, but that we, being warned by his threatenings, might not bring them upon ourselves.

I will conclude all with the counsel of the wise man, Wisdom of Solomon, chap. i. 12. 13. 16. *Seek not death in the error of your life: and pull not upon yourselves destruction, with the works of your own hands. For God made not death: neither hath he pleasure in the destruction of the living. But ungodly men, with their works and words, have called it down upon themselves.* Which that none of us may do, God, of his infinite goodness, grant, for his mercies sake in Jesus Christ. To whom, with thee, O Father, and the Holy Ghost, be all honour and glory, dominion and power, thanksgiving and praise, both now and for ever. *Amen.*

S E R:

S E R M O N XXXVI.

Success not always answerable to the probability of second causes.

Being a fast-sermon preached before the House of Commons, on Wednesday, April 16. 1690.

E C C L. ix. 11.

I returned, and saw under the sun, that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favour to men of skill, but time and chance happeneth to them all.

NExt to the acknowledgement of God's being, nothing is more essential to religion, than the belief of his providence, and a constant dependence upon him, as the great governor of the world, and the wise disposer of all the affairs and concernments of the children of men; and nothing can be a greater argument of providence, than that there is such an order of causes laid in nature, that in ordinary course every thing does usually attain its end; and yet that there is such a mixture of contingency, as that now and then, we cannot tell how or why, the most likely causes do deceive us, and fail of producing their usual effects.

For if there be a God and a providence, it is reasonable that things should be thus: because a providence does suppose all things to have been at first wisely framed, and with a fitness to attain their end: but yet it does also suppose, that God hath reserved to himself a power and liberty to interpose, and to cross, as he pleases, the usual course of things; to awaken men to the consideration of him, and a continual dependence upon him; and to teach us to ascribe those things to his wise disposal,

which, if we never saw any change, we should be apt to impute to blind necessity. And therefore the wise man, to bring us to an acknowledgement of the divine providence, tells us, that thus he had observed things to be in this world; that though they generally happen according to the probability of second causes, yet sometimes they fall out quite otherwise: *I returned, and saw under the sun, that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, &c.*

The connexion of which words with the foregoing discourse, is briefly this. Among many other observations which the wise preacher makes in this sermon, of the vanity and uncertainty of all things in this world, and of the mistakes of men about them, he takes notice here in the text, and in the verse before it, of two extremes in human life: Some, because of the uncertainty of all worldly things, cast off all care and diligence, and neglect the use of proper and probable means, having found by experience, that, when men have done all they can, they many times fail of their end, and are disappointed they know not how: Others, on the contrary, rely so much upon their own skill and industry, as to promise success to themselves in all their undertakings; and presume so much upon second causes, as if no consideration at all were to be had of the first.

The wise preacher reproves both these extremes, and shews the folly and vanity of them. On the one hand, of those who sit still, and will use no care and endeavour, because it may all happen to be disappointed, and to fail of success: not considering, that though prudent care and diligence will not always do the business, yet there is nothing to be done without them, in the ordinary course of things; and that in the order of second causes, these are the most likely and effectual means to any end: and therefore, rejecting this lazy principle, he counsels men, whatever they propose to themselves, to be very diligent and vigorous in the use of proper means for the attainment of it, in the verse immediately before the text, *Whatever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might.*

But then he observes also as great a folly and vanity on the other hand; that they who manage their affairs
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with great wisdom and industry, are apt to presume and reckon upon the certain success of them, without taking into consideration that which, in all human affairs, is most considerable, the favour and blessing of that almighty and wise Providence which rules the world: *I returned, (says he), and saw under the sun, that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, &c.*

I returned, and saw; that is, having considered on the one hand, the folly of sloth and carelessness, I turned mine eyes the other way, and saw as great an error on the other hand; in men presuming too much upon their own diligence and conduct, without taking notice of the providence of God. For I have found, says Solomon, by manifold observations, that the success of things does not always answer the probability of second causes and means. So that the sum of the preacher's advice is this: When thou propoudest any end to thyself, be diligent and vigorous in the use of means; and when thou hast done all, look above and beyond these to a superior cause, which over-rules, and steers, and stops, as he pleases, all the motions and activity of second causes. And be not confident that all things are ever so wisely and firmly laid, that they cannot fail of success: for the providence of God doth many times step in, to divert the most probable event of things, and to turn it quite another way; and whenever he pleaseth to do so, the most strong and likely means do fall lame, or stumble, or, by some accident or other, come short of their end.

I returned, and saw under the sun; that is, here below, in this inferior world.

That the race is not to the swift. This the Chaldee paraphrast does understand with relation to warlike affairs. *I beheld, (says he) and saw that they who are swift as eagles, do not always escape in the day of battle.* But I chuse rather to understand the words in their more obvious sense, that, in a race, many things may happen to hinder him that is swiftest from winning it.

Nor the battle to the strong; that is, victory and success in war do not always attend the greatest force and

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preparations; nor doth that side which in human estimation is strongest, always prevail and get the better.

Nor yet bread to the wise; Neque doctorum panem esse: So some render the words, that learned men are not always secured against poverty and want.

Nor yet riches to men of understanding; for so some interpreters translate the words, *Neque industriis divitias esse*, that those who take most pains, do not always get the greatest estates.

Nor yet favour to men of skill; that is, to those who understand men and business, and how to apply themselves dextrously to the inclinations and interests of princes and great men. Others interpret these words more generally, *Neque peritorum artificum esse gratiam;* that those who excel most in their several arts and professions, do not always meet with suitable encouragement; but because the word which is here rendered *favour*, is so frequently used by Solomon for the favour of princes, the former sense seems to be more easy and natural.

But time and chance happeneth to them all; that is, saith Aben Ezra, there is a secret providence of God, which sometimes presents man with unexpected opportunities, and interposeth accidents, which no human wisdom could foresee; which gives success to very unlikely means, and defeats the swift, and the strong, and the learned, and the industrious, and them that are best versed in men and business, of their several ends and designs.

It sometimes happens, that he that is swiftest, by a fall, or by fainting, or by some other unlucky accident, may lose the race.

It sometimes falls out, that a much smaller and weaker number, by the advantage of ground, or of a pass; by a stratagem, or by a sudden surprise, or by some other accident and opportunity, may be victorious over a much greater force.

And that an unlearned man, in comparison, by favour, or friends, or by some happy chance of setting out to the best advantage the little learning he has, before one that hath less, may arrive at great things; when perhaps, at the same time, the man that is a
hundred

hundred times more learned than he, may be ready to starve.

And that men of no great parts and industry, may stumble into an estate, and by some casual hit in trade may attain such a fortune, as the man that hath toiled and drudged all his life, shall never be able to reach.

And, lastly, that a man of no great ambition or design, may fall into an opportunity, and, by happening upon the *mollia tempora fandi*, some soft and lucky season of address, may slide into his prince's favour, and all on the sudden be hoisted up to that degree of dignity and esteem, as the designing man, who hath been laying trains to blow up his rivals, and waiting opportunities all his days to worm others out, and to screw himself in, shall never be able to attain.

The words thus explained, contain this general proposition, which shall be the subject of my following discourse :

That, in human affairs, the most likely means do not always attain their end, nor does the event constantly answer the probability of second causes ; but there is a secret providence which governs and over-rules all things, and does, when it pleases, interpose to defeat the most hopeful and probable designs.

In the handling of this proposition, I shall do these three things.

1. I shall confirm and illustrate the truth of it, by an induction of the particulars which are instanced in, here in the text.

2. I shall give some reason and account of this, why the providence of God doth sometimes interpose to hinder and defeat the most probable designs.

3. I shall draw some inferences from the whole, suitable to the occasion of this day. In all which, I shall endeavour to be as brief as conveniently I can.

I. For the confirmation and illustration of this proposition, That the most likely means do not always attain their end ; but there is a secret providence, which over-rules and governs all events, and does, when it pleases, interpose to defeat the most probable and hopeful designs. This is the general conclusion which Solomon proves by
this

this induction of particulars in the text. And he instanceth in the most probable means for the compassing of the several ends which most men in this world propose to themselves. And the great darlings of mankind are, victory, riches, and honour. I do not mention pleasure, because that seems rather to result from the use and enjoyment of the other. Now, if a man design victory, what more probable means to overcome in a race, than swiftness? what more likely to prevail in war, than strength? If a man aim at riches, what more proper to raise an estate, than understanding and industry? If a man aspire to honour, what more likely to prefer him to the King's favour and service, than dexterity and skill in business? And yet experience shews, that these means, as probable as they seem to be, are not always successful for the accomplishment of their several ends.

Or else we may suppose, that Solomon by these instances did intend to represent the chief engines and instruments of human designs and actions. Now, there are five things more especially which do eminently qualify a man for any undertaking; expedition and quickness of dispatch, strength and force, providence and forecast, diligence and industry, knowledge and insight into men and business; and some think, that Solomon did intend to represent these several qualities by the several instances in the text. *The race is not to the swift*; that is, men of the greatest expedition and dispatch do not always succeed: for we see that men do sometimes outrun business, and make hast to be undone. *Nor the battle to the strong*; that is, neither does force and strength always carry it. *Nor yet bread to the wise*; which some understand of the provident care and pains of the husbandman, whose harvest is not always answerable to his labour and hopes. *Nor yet riches to men of understanding*, or industry; that is, neither is diligence in business always crowned with success. *Nor yet favour to men of skill*; that is, neither have they that have the greatest dexterity in the management of affairs always the fortune to rise. And if we take the words in this sense, the thing will come much to one. But I rather approve the first interpretation, as being less forced, and nearer to the letter.

So that the force of Solomon's reasoning is this: If the swiftest do not always win the race, nor the strongest always overcome in war: if knowledge and learning do not always secure men from want, nor industry always make men rich, nor political skill always raise men to high place; nor any other means that can be instanced in, as most probable, do constantly and infallibly succeed: then it must be acknowledged, that there is some other cause which mingles itself with human affairs, and governs all events; and which can, and does when it pleases, defeat the most likely, and bring to pass the most improbable designs. And what else can that be imagined to be, but the secret and over-ruling providence of Almighty God? When we can find no other, we are very unreasonable if we will not admit this to be the cause of such extraordinary events, but will obstinately impute that to blind necessity or chance which hath such plain characters upon it of a divine power and wisdom.

I might be large upon every one of those instances in the text, and illustrate them by pat and lively examples both out of scripture and other histories. But I shall briefly pass over all of them, but the second, *The battle is not to the strong.*

The race is not to the swift. If we understand this literally, it is obvious to every man, to imagine a great many accidents in a race, which may snatch victory from the swiftest runner. If we understand it as the Chaldee paraphrast does, with relation to war, that the swiftest does not always overcome or escape in the day of battle; of this Asahel is an eminent instance, who though he was, as the scripture tells us, *light of foot as a wild roe*, yet did he not escape the spear of Abner. It seems that, among the ancients, swiftness was looked upon as a great qualification in a warrior; both because it serves for a sudden assault and onset, and likewise for that which in civility we call a nimble retreat. And therefore David, in his poetical lamentation over those two great captains, Saul and Jonathan, takes particular notice of this warlike quality of theirs: *They were* (says he) *swifter than eagles, stronger than lions.* And the constant character which Homer gives of Achilles, one of his principal heroes, is, that he was swift of foot. The poet feigns

feigns of him, that, by some charm or gift of the gods, he was invulnerable in all parts of his body except his heel; and that was the part to which he trusted, and in that he received his mortal wound: the wise poet hereby instructing us, that many times our greatest danger lies there, where we place our chief confidence and safety.

Nor yet bread to the wise, or to the learned. The poverty of poets is proverbial; and there are frequent instances in history, of eminently learned persons that have been reduced to great straits and necessities.

Nor yet riches to men of understanding. By which, whether we understand men of great parts, or of great diligence and industry; it is obvious to every man's observation, that an ordinary capacity and understanding does usually lie more level to the business of a common trade and profession, than more refined and elevated parts; which lie rather for speculation than practice, and are better fitted for the pleasure and ornament of conversation, than for the toil and drudgery of business: as a fine razor is admirable for cutting hairs, but the dull hatchet much more proper for hewing a hard and knotty piece of timber. And even when parts and industry meet together, they are many times less successful in the raising of a great estate, than men of much lower and slower understandings: because these are apt to admire riches, which is a great spur to industry; and because they are perpetually intent upon one thing, and mind but one business, from which their thoughts never straggle into vain and useless inquiries after knowledge, or news, or public affairs; all which being foreign to their business, they leave to those who are, as they are wont to say of them in scorn, more curious, and too wise to be rich.

Nor yet favour to men of skill. All history is full of instances of the casual advancement of men to great favour and honour, when others, who have made it their serious study and business, have fallen short of it. I could give a famous example in this kind, of the manifold and manifest disappointment of a whole order of men; the swiftest and most subtle, *in their generation, of all the children of this world*; the most politically instituted,

tuted, and the best studied and skilled in the tempers and interests of men ; the most pragmatical, and cunning to insinuate themselves into the intrigues of courts and great families ; and who, by long experience, and an universal intelligence, and communicated observations, have reduced human affairs, at least as they think, to a certain art and method, and to the most steady rules that such contingent things are capable of. I believe you all guess beforehand whom I mean, even the honest Jesuits. And yet these men of so much art and skill have met with as many checks and disappointments, as any sort of men ever did : they have been discountenanced by almost all princes and states, and, one time or other, banished out of most of the courts and countries of Europe. And it is no small argument of the divine providence, that so much cunning hath met with so little countenance and success ; and hath been so often so grossly infatuated, and their *counsels turned into foolishness*.

But I promised only to mention these, and to insist upon the second instance in the text, *I returned, and saw under the sun, that the battle is not to the strong ; to the gibborim, the giants*, for so the Hebrew word signifies. In which Solomon might possibly have respect to the history of the Israelites subduing the Canaanites, a people of great strength and stature, among whom were the *giants, the sons of Anak* ; or, more probably, to the famous encounter of his father David with the great Goliath. But, however that be, the scripture is full of examples to this purpose, that, when the providence of God is pleased to interpose in favour of any side, it becomes victorious ; according to the saying of King Aha in his prayer to God, 2 Chron. xiv. 11. *It is nothing with thee to help, whether with many, or with those that have no power.*

Sometimes God hath defeated great armies by plain and apparent miracles. Such was the drowning of Pharaoh and his host in the Red sea ; and the stars fighting in their courses against Sisera : by which poetical expression I suppose is meant, Sisera's being remarkably defeated by a visible hand from heaven. And such was the destruction of the proud King of Assyria's army by an

angel, who slew an hundred and fourscore and five thousand of them in one night.

Sometimes God does this by more human ways, by striking mighty armies with a pannick and unaccountable fear; and sometimes by putting extraordinary spirits and courage into the weaker side, so that *an hundred shall chase a thousand, and a thousand shall put ten thousand to flight.*

This made David so frequently to acknowledge the providence of God, especially in the affairs of war: Psal. xxxiii. 16. *There is no king saved by the multitude of an host, neither is a mighty man delivered by much strength;* and again, Psal. xlv. 6. *I will not trust in my bow, neither shall my sword save me.* And Solomon confirms the same observation: *There is no wisdom (says he) nor understanding, nor counsel against the Lord. The horse is prepared against the day of battle; but safety (or, as some translations render it, victory) is of the Lord,* Prov. xxi. 30. 31. Gideon, by a very odd stratagem, of lamps and pitchers, defeated a very numerous army, only with three hundred men. Jonathan and his armour-bearer, by climbing up a rock, and coming suddenly on the back of the Philistines camp, struck them with such a terror as put their whole army to flight. King Aza, with a much inferior number, defeated that huge Ethiopian army, which consisted of a million. And how was Xerxes's mighty army overthrown almost by a handful of Grecians? And, to come nearer to ourselves, how was that formidable fleet of the Spaniards, which they presumptuously called *invincible*, shattered and broken in pieces, chiefly by the winds and the sea? So many accidents are there, especially in war, whereby the divine providence doth sometimes interpose, and give victory to the weaker side.

And this hath been so apparent in all ages, that even the Heathen did always acknowledge, in the affairs of war, a special interposition of fortune; by which the wiser among them did understand the divine providence. Plutarch, speaking of the Romans, says, that time and fortune, the very same with Solomon's time and chance here in the text, did lay the foundation of their greatness; by which he ascribes their success to a remarkable providence

providence of God concurring with several happy opportunities.

And Livy, their great historian, hath this remarkable observation, That "in all human affairs, especially in matters of war, fortune hath a mighty stroke." And again, "No where (says he) is the event less answerable to expectation than in war; and therefore nothing is so flight and inconsiderable, which may not turn the scales in a great matter." And Cæsar himself, who was perhaps the most skilful and prosperous warrior that ever was, makes the same acknowledgement: "As in all other things, (says he), so particularly in war, fortune hath a huge sway." And Plutarch observes, that there was no temple at Rome dedicated to Wisdom or Valour, but a most magnificent and stately one to Fortune; signifying hereby, that they did ascribe their success infinitely more to the providence of God, than to their own courage and conduct. I proceed now, in the

II. Second place, to give some reason and account of this, why the providence of God doth sometimes thus interpose to hinder and defeat the most probable designs of men; to bring men to an acknowledgement of his providence, and of their dependence upon him, and subordination to him; and that he is the great governor of the world, and *rules in the kingdoms of men*; and that *all the inhabitants of the earth are as nothing to him*, and the power of second causes inconsiderable; that *he doth according to his will, in the armies of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none may stay his hand, or say unto him, What dost thou?*

God hath so ordered things, in the administration of the affairs of the world, as to encourage the use of means, and yet so as to keep men in a continual dependence upon him for the efficacy and success of them. To encourage industry and prudence, God generally permits things to their natural course, and to fall out according to the power and probability of second causes.

But then, lest men should cast off religion, and *deny the God that is above*; lest they should *trust in their sword and their bow*, and say, *The Lord hath not done this*;

lest men should look upon themselves as the creators and framers of their own fortune; and, when they do but a little outstrip others in wisdom or power, in the skill and conduct of human affairs, they should grow proud and presumptuous: God is pleased sometimes more remarkably to interpose, *to hide pride from man*, as the expression is in Job; to check the haughtiness and insolence of mens spirits, and to keep them within the bounds of modesty and humility; to make us to know *that we are but men*, and that the reins of the world are not in our hands, but that there is one above who sways and governs all things here below.

And indeed if we should suppose, in the first frame of things, which we call *nature*, an immutable order to be fixed, and all things to go on in a constant course, according to the power and force of second causes, without any interposition of providence to stop or alter that course, upon any occasion; in this case, the foundation of a great part of religion, but especially of prayer to God, would be quite taken away. Upon this supposition, it would be the vainest thing in the world, to pray to God for the good success of our undertakings, or to acknowledge him as the author of it: for if God do only look on, and permit all things to proceed in a settled and established course, then, instead of praying to God, we ought to ply the means, and to make the best provision and preparation we can for the effecting of what we desire; and to rely upon that, without taking God at all into our counsel and consideration. For all application to God by prayer doth evidently suppose, that the providence of God does frequently interpose to over-rule events besides and beyond the natural and ordinary course of things, and to steer them to a quite different point from that to which in human probability they seemed to tend.

So that it is every whit as necessary to religion, to believe the providence of God, and that he governs the world, and does, when he pleases, interpose in the affairs of it, as that he made it at first. I come now, in the

III. Third and last place, to make some inferences suitable to the occasion of this day, from what hath been said upon this argument. And they shall be these.

I. From

1. From hence we may learn, not to account religion, and time spent in the service of God, and in prayer to him for his blessing upon our endeavours, to be any hinderance to our affairs: for, after we have done all we can, the event is still in God's hand, and rests upon the disposal of his providence.

And did men firmly believe this, they would not neglect the duty of prayer, and behave themselves so carelessly, and unconcernedly, and irreverently in it, as we see too many do; they would not look upon every hour that is spent in devotion, as lost from their business.

If men would but take a view of what hath happened to them in the course of a long life, I believe most of us would see reason to acknowledge, that our prosperity and success in any kind hath depended more upon happy opportunities, upon undesigned and unexpected occurrences, than upon our own prudent forecast and conduct.

And if this were well considered by us, we should not methinks be so apt to leave God out of our councils and undertakings, as if he were a mere name and cypher in the world. It is, I am sure, the advice of one that was much wiser, and more experienced, than any of us will pretend to be, I mean Solomon, Prov. iii. 5. 6. 7. *Trust in the Lord with all thine heart, and lean not to thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths. Be not wise in thine own eyes: fear the Lord, and depart from evil.* There is no principle that ought more firmly to be believed by us than this, that to live under a constant sense and awe of Almighty God, to depend upon his providence, and to seek his favour and blessing upon all our designs; being fearful to offend him, and careful to please him, is a much nearer and surer way to success, than our own best prudence and preparations.

And therefore, at such a time, more especially, when we are going to war, or engaged in it, we should break off our sins, by repentance, and the sincere resolution of a better course; we should earnestly implore the blessing of God upon our undertakings; and not only take great care that our cause be just, but likewise that there be *no wicked thing* amongst us, to drive God out of our camp;

no accursed thing, that may provoke him to deliver us into the hands of our enemies. It was a particular law given by God to the Jews, Deut. xxiii. 9. *When the host goeth forth against thine enemy, then keep thyself from every wicked thing; then, that is, more especially at such a time.*

And this is a necessary caution, not only to those who are personally engaged in the war, that, by the favour of God, they may have their heads covered in the day of battle, or, if God shall suffer them to fall by the hand of the enemy, that, having made their peace beforehand with him, they may not only have the comfort of a good cause, but of a good conscience, void of offence towards God and man.

But this caution likewise concerns those who are interested in the success and the event of the war; as we all are, not only in regard of our lives and estates, but of that which ought to be much dearer to us, our religion, and the freedom of our consciences; which are now every whit as much at stake as our civil interests and liberties. And therefore, as we tender any, or all of these, we should be very careful to keep ourselves from every wicked thing; that they who fight for us, may not, for our sins, and for our sakes, turn their backs in the day of battle, and fall by the sword of the enemy.

2. From hence we may likewise learn, so to use the means, as still to depend upon God; who can, as he pleases, bless the counsels and endeavours of men, or blast them, and make them of none effect. For as God hath promised nothing, but to a wise and diligent use of means; so all our prudence and industry, and most careful preparations, may miscarry, if he do not favour our design: for without him, nothing is wise, nothing is strong, nothing is able to reach and attain its end.

We should indeed use the means as vigorously, as if God did nothing; and when we have done so, we should depend upon God for the success of those means, as if we ourselves had done nothing, but did expect all from his favour and blessing: for, when all is done, we are only safe under his protection, and sure of success from his blessing.

For

For whatever vain and foolish men may say in their hearts, there is, there is a God, that made the world, and administers the affairs of it with great wisdom and goodness; else how came any of us into being, or what do we here? Did we not most assuredly believe, that there is a God, that governs the world, and superintends human affairs, the first wish of a wise man would be, to steal out of being, if he could; and that the same chance or necessity that brought him into the world, would take the first opportunity to carry him out. For to be every moment liable to present, and great, and certain evils; and to have no security against the continuance of them, or the return of the same or worse evils; nor to have any assurance of a better and more durable state of rest and happiness hereafter, is in truth so very melancholy a meditation, that I do not know any consideration in the world that is of force and power enough to support the mind of man under it: and were there not in the world a being that is wiser and better, and more powerful than ourselves, and that keeps things from running into endless confusion and disorder; a being that loves us, and takes care of us, and that will certainly consider and reward all the good that we do, and all the evil that we suffer upon his account, I do not see what reason any man could have to take any comfort and joy in being, or to wish the continuance of it for one moment.

3. And lastly, The consideration of what hath been said upon this argument, should keep us from being too sanguine and confident of the most likely designs and undertakings; because these do not always answer the probability of second causes or means; and never less, than when we do with the greatest confidence rely upon them: when we promise most to ourselves from them, then are they most likely to deceive us. They are, as the Prophet compares them, like a broken reed, which a man may walk with in his hand, whilst he lays no great stress upon it; but if he trust to it, and lean his whole weight on it, it will not only fail him, but even pierce him through.

And we cannot do a greater prejudice to our affairs, when they are in the most hopeful and likely condition to succeed and do well, than to shut God and his providence

dence out of our counsels and consideration. When we pass God by, and take no notice of him, but will rely upon our own wisdom and strength, we provoke him to leave us *in the hands of our own counsel*, and to let us see what weak and foolish creatures we are: and a man is never in greater danger of drowning, than when he clasps his arms closest about himself: besides that God loves to resist the self-confident and presumptuous, and *to scatter the proud in the imagination of their hearts*.

And as in all our concernments, we ought to have a great regard to God, the supreme disposer of all things, and earnestly to seek his favour and blessing upon all our undertakings; so more especially in the affairs of war; in which the providence of God is pleased many times, in a very peculiar manner, to interpose and interest itself. And there is great reason to think he does so; because all war is, as it were, an appeal to God, and a reference of those causes to the decision of his providence, which, through the pride, and injustice, and perverse passions of men, can receive no other determination.

And here God loves to shew himself, and in an eminent manner to take part with right and justice against those mighty oppressors of the earth, who, like an overflowing flood, would bear down all before them. In this case, the providence of God is sometimes pleased to give a remarkable check to great power and violence, and to one that vainly gives out himself not unequal to the whole world, by very weak and contemptible means; and, as the Apostle elegantly expresseth it, *by the things which are not, to bring to nought the things that are*; and to say to him, as God once did to the proud King of Assyria, *Whom hast thou reproached and blasphemed? and against whom hast thou exalted thy voice, and lifted up thine eyes on high? even against the Holy One of Israel. Hast thou not heard long ago, that I have done it, and of ancient times that I have formed it? now have I brought it to pass, that thou shouldst be to lay waste defenced cities into ruinous heaps. Therefore their inhabitants were of small power, they were dismayed and confounded, &c. But I know thy abode, and thy going out, and thy coming in, and thy rage against me. Because thy rage against me, and thy tumult is come up into mine ears; therefore will*

I put my hook in thy nose, and my bridle in thy lips, and I will turn thee back by the way by which thou camest.—The zeal of the Lord of hosts shall do this, Is. xxxvii. 23. 26. 27. 28. 29. 32.

But more especially, in vindication of his oppressed truth and religion, and in the great and signal deliverances of his church and people, God is wont to take the conduct of affairs into his own hands, and not to proceed by human rules and measures. He then bids second causes to stand by, that his own arm may be seen, and his salvation may appear. He raiseth the spirits of men above their natural pitch, *and giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might, he increaseth strength*, as the Prophet expresseth it.

Thus hath the providence of God very visibly appeared in our late deliverance; in such a manner, as I know not whether he ever did for any other nation, except the people of Israel, when he delivered them *from the house of bondage, by so mighty a hand, and so outstretched an arm*. And yet too many among us, I speak it this day to our shame, do not seem to have the least sense of this great deliverance, or of the hand of God which was so visible in it; but, like the children of Israel, when they were brought out of Egypt, we are full of all murmurings and discontent against God the author, and his servant the happy instrument under God of this our deliverance. What the Prophet says of that people, may, I fear, be too justly applied to us, Is. xxvi. 10. 11. *Let favour be shewn to the wicked, yet will he not learn righteousness: in the land of uprightness he will deal unjustly, and will not behold the majesty of the Lord. Lord, when thine hand is lifted up, they will not see: but they shall see, and be ashamed.* And I hope I may add that which follows in the next verse, *Lord, thou wilt ordain peace for us: for thou also hast wrought all our works for us.*

What God hath already done for our deliverance is, I hope, an earnest that he will carry it on to a perfect peace and settlement; and this notwithstanding our high provocations, and horrible ingratitude to *the God of our life, and of our salvation.*

And whenever the providence of God thinks fit thus to interpose in human affairs, *the race is not to the swift,*
nor

nor the battle to the strong. For which reason, their Majesties, in their great piety and wisdom, and from a just sense of the providence of Almighty God, which *rules in the kingdoms of men*, have thought fit to set apart this day for solemn repentance and humiliation; that the many and heinous sins, which we in this nation have been, and still are guilty of, and which are, of all other, our greatest and most dangerous enemies, may not *separate between God and us*, and *hinder good things from us*, and cover us with confusion in the day of our danger and distress: and likewise earnestly to implore the favour and blessing of Almighty God upon their Majesties forces and preparations by sea and land; and more particularly, for the preservation of his Majesty's sacred person, upon whom so much depends, and who is contented again to hazard himself to save us.

To conclude: There is no such way to engage the providence of God for us, as by real repentance and reformation; and by doing all we can, in our several places, from the highest to the lowest, by the provision of wise and effectual laws for the discountenancing and suppressing of profaneness and vice, and by the careful and due execution of them, and by the more kindly and powerful influence of a good example to retrieve the ancient piety and virtue of the nation. For without this, whatever we may think of the firmness of our present settlement, we cannot long be upon good terms with Almighty God, upon whose favour depends the prosperity and stability of the present and future times.

I have but one thing more to mind you of; and that is, to stir up your charity towards the poor; which is likewise a great part of the duty of this day, and which ought always to accompany our prayers and fastings. *Thy prayers and thine alms* (saith the angel to Cornelius), *are come up before God*: and therefore, if we desire that our prayers should reach heaven, and receive a gracious answer from God, we must send up our alms along with them.

And instead of all other arguments to this purpose, I shall only recite to you the plain and persuasive words of God himself; in which he declares what kind of fast is acceptable to him: *Is it such a fast as I have chosen? a*
day

Ser. 36. the probability of second causes.

day for a man to afflict his soul? is it to bow down his head as a bulrush, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? wilt thou call this a fast, and an acceptable day to the Lord? Is not this the fast that I have chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness, and to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke? is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out, to thine house? when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him, and that thou bide not thyself from thine own flesh? Then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thy salvation shall spring forth speedily: thy righteousness, or thine alms, shall go before thee; and the glory of the Lord shall be thy reward. Then shalt thou call, and I will answer thee; thou shalt cry, and he shall say, Here I am, Is. lviii. 5. 6. &c.

Now, to him that sitteth upon the throne, and to the Lamb that was slain: to God, even our Father, and to our Lord Jesus Christ, the first begotten from the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth; unto him, who hath loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father: to him be glory and dominion, for ever and ever. Amen.

And the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is well pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

S E R.

S E R M O N XXXVII.

The way to prevent the ruin of a sinful people.

A fast-sermon, preached before the Lord Mayor, &c.
on Wednesday, June 18. 1690.

The E P I S T L E D E D I C A T O R Y.

To the Right Honourable Sir THOMAS PILKINGTON,
Lord Mayor of the city of London, and the court of
Aldermen.

My Lord,

IN obedience to your commands, I have published this
sermon lately preached before you, and do now humbly
present you with it; heartily wishing it may have that good
effect for the reformation of our lives, and reconciliation
of our unhappy differences, which was sincerely intended
by,

My Lord,

Your most faithful and humble servant,

JO. TILLOTSON.

The S E R M O N.

JER. vi. 8.

*Be thou instructed, O Jerusalem, lest my soul depart from
thee, lest I make thee desolate, a land not inhabited.*

THese words are a merciful warning from God to the
people of Israel by the Prophet Jeremiah, the last
Prophet that God sent to them before their captivity in
Babylon.

The

The time of his prophecy was of a long continuance, above the space of forty years, *viz.* from the thirteenth year of King Josiah, to the eleventh year of King Zedekiah, the year in which Jerufalem was taken by Nebuchadnezzar King of Babylon.

This I observe, to shew the great patience of God to a sinful nation. And this is much the same space of time that God gave warning by our blessed Saviour and his Apostles to the same people of the Jews concerning their final destruction. For it was about forty years after the prediction of our Saviour concerning it, just before his death, that the terrible destruction of Jerufalem and the Jewish nation was executed upon them by the Romans, or rather chiefly by themselves, as I shall presently shew. Of which dreadful desolation, the first taking of Jerufalem by Nebuchadnezzar, and their captivity into Babylon, was a kind of type and forerunner. For, as Josephus observes, the taking of Jerufalem by Titus Vespasian did happen in the very same month, and on the very same day of the month in which Jerufalem was taken by Nebuchadnezzar, *viz.* upon our 10th of August.

And it is not unworthy of our observation, that the time of God's warning is wont to hold some sort of proportion with the extent of his judgements. Before the universal deluge, which destroyed the whole world, Noah and his family only excepted, God gave a much longer warning, by the preaching of Noah for the space of an hundred and twenty years. Before the destruction of a particular nation, if we may judge by God's dealing with the Jews, his time of warning is forty years. And before the destruction of a particular city, if we may conclude any thing from the single example of Nineveh, the time of God's warning is yet much shorter, the space of forty days.

And now to what end doth God exercise so much patience, and threaten so long beforehand, but that by the terror of his threatenings men may be brought to repentance, and by repentance may prevent the execution of them? For all the while that God by his Prophet threatens ruin and destruction to the people of Israel, he earnestly invites and urges them to repentance, that by this means they might escape the ruin that was denounced

against them: this being a condition perpetually implied in the denunciation of public judgements, that if a people repent of the evil of their doings, God also will repent of the evil which he said he would do unto them; as he expressly declares, chap. xviii. 7. 8. *At what instant I speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, and to pull down, and to destroy it: if that nation against whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil which I thought to do unto them.* And here in the text, after God had threatened destruction to Jerusalem, because of the overflowing of all manner of wickedness and oppression in the midst of her, he gives her a merciful warning to prevent this ruin and desolation by repentance, ver. 6. 7. *Thus hath the Lord of hosts said, Hew ye down trees, and cast a mount against Jerusalem: this is a city to be visited, she is wholly oppression in the midst of her. As a fountain casteth out waters, so she casteth out her wickedness: before me continually is grief and wounds.* And yet, when he had pronounced this fearful sentence upon her, he tells her, that all this misery and desolation might yet be prevented, if they would but hearken to the counsel of God, and be instructed by him concerning the things of their peace: For so it follows in the next words, *Be thou instructed, O Jerusalem, lest my soul depart from thee; lest I make thee desolate, a land not inhabited. Be thou instructed, O Jerusalem;* that is, Do but now at last take that counsel and warning, which hath so often and so long been tendered to thee by my servant the Prophet, who hath now for the space of forty years continually, and that with great earnestness and importunity, been warning thee of this danger, and calling thee to repentance and a better mind.

Lest my soul depart from thee. In the Hebrew it is, *Lest my soul be loosened and disjointed from thee*, as it is in the margin of your Bibles; hereby signifying, in the most emphatical manner, the wonderful affection and kindness which God had for his people, and how strongly his soul was linked to them, and how loth he was to withdraw his love from them: it was like the tearing off of a limb, or the plucking of a joint in sunder. So unwilling is God to come to extremity, so hardly is he brought

brought to resolve upon the ruin even of a sinful nation : how much rather would he, that they would be instructed, and receive correction, and hearken to the things of their peace ? But if they will not be persuaded, if no warning will work upon them, *his spirit will not always strive with them ; but his soul will at last, though with great unwillingness and reluctancy, depart from them.*

And then no intercession will prevail for them ; as he threatens by the same Prophet, chap. xv. 1. *Then said the Lord unto me, Though Moses and Samuel stood before me, yet my mind could not be towards this people ; cast them out of my sight, and let them go forth ; away with them into captivity, for they have lost my heart ; and no intercession of others for them, nothing but their own repentance, can recover it.*

And when his soul is once departed from a people, and his heart turned against them, then all sorts of evils and calamities will be let loose upon them ; as we may read in the next verse of that chapter, Jer. xv. 2. *And it shall come to pass, if they say unto thee, Whither shall we go forth ? then thou shalt tell them, Thus saith the Lord, Such as are for death, to death ; and such as are for the sword, to the sword ; and such as are for the famine, to the famine ; and such as are for the captivity, to the captivity.* For then God will be weary of repenting ; as he tells them, ver. 6. *Thou hast forsaken me, saith the Lord, thou art gone backward : therefore will I stretch out my hand against thee, and destroy thee ; I am weary with repenting.* By our obstinate impenitency we harden the heart of God against us, and make him weary of repenting. And when his soul is thus departed from a people, nothing remains but a fearful expectation of ruin : Hof. ix. 12. *Wo unto them, (saith God by the Prophet), when I depart from them. Therefore be thou instructed, O Jerusalem, lest my soul depart from thee ; lest I make thee desolate, a land not inhabited.*

Having given this account of the words, I shall observe from them three things well worth our consideration.

1. The infinite goodness and patience of God towards a sinful people, and his great unwillingness to bring ruin and destruction upon them : *Lest my soul depart from*

thee ; lest I make thee desolate, a land not inhabited. How loth is he that things should come to this extremity ? He is not without great difficulty, and some kind of violence, as it were, offered to himself, brought to this severe resolution ; his soul is, as it were, rent and disjointed from them.

2. You see here what is the only proper and effectual means to prevent the misery and ruin of a sinful people. If they will be instructed, and take warning by the threatenings of God, and will become wiser and better, then *his soul* will not depart from them, he will not bring upon them the desolation which he hath threatened.

3. You have here intimated the miserable case and condition of a people, when God takes off his affection from them, and gives over all further care and concernment for them. *Wo unto them when his soul departs from them.* For when God once leaves them, then all sorts of evils and calamities will break in upon them.

I shall speak as briefly as I can to these three observations from the text.

I. I observe the infinite patience and goodness of God towards a sinful people, and his great unwillingness to bring ruin and destruction upon them : *Lest my soul depart from thee ; lest I make thee desolate, a land not inhabited.* How loth is God that things should come to this ? He is very patient to particular persons, notwithstanding their great and innumerable provocations. God is strong and patient, though men provoke him every day. And much greater is his patience to whole nations and great communities of men.

How great was it to the old world, *when the long-suffering of God waited in the days of Noah* for the space of an hundred and twenty years ; and did not expire till *he saw that the wickedness of man was grown great upon the earth, and that all flesh had corrupted its way ;* not till it was necessary to drown the world, to cleanse it ; and to destroy mankind, to reform it, by beginning a new world upon the only righteous family that was left of all the last generation of the old ? For so God testifies concerning Noah, when he commanded him to enter into the ark, saying, Gen. vii. 1. *Come thou, and all thy house*

house into the ark : for thee (that is, thee only) have I seen righteous before me in this generation.

The patience of God was great likewise to Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities about them. For when *the cry of their sins had reached heaven*, and called loud for vengeance to be poured down upon them ; to express the wonderful patience of God towards such grievous sinners, though nothing is hid from his sight and knowledge, yet he is represented as coming down from heaven to earth, on purpose to inquire into the truth of things, and *whether they were altogether according to the cry that was come up to him* : and when he found things as bad as was possible, yet then was he willing to have come almost to the lowest terms imaginable, that if there had been but *ten righteous persons* in those wicked cities, *he would not have destroyed them for the tens sake.*

Nay, he seems to come to lower terms yet with the city of Jerusalem, Jer. v. 1. *Run ye to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem, and see now and know, and seek in the broad places thereof, if ye can find a man, if there be any that executeth judgement, and seeketh the truth, and I will pardon it.*

What can be imagined more slow, and mild, and merciful, than the proceedings of the divine justice against a sinful people ? God is represented in scripture as taking a long time to *make ready his bow*, and to *whet his glittering sword*, before *his hand takes hold of vengeance* ; as if the instruments of his wrath lay by him blunt and rusty, and unready for use. Many a time he threatens, and many a time lifts up his hand, before he gives the fatal blow. And how glad is he when any good man will step in, and interpose to stay his hand ? as we read, Psal. cvi. 23. *Therefore he said, (speaking of the people of Israel) that he would destroy them, had not Moses his servant stood in the breach, to turn away his wrath, lest he should destroy them.* And how kindly doth God take it of Phinehas, as a most acceptable piece of service done to him, and which he hardly knew how sufficiently to reward, that he was a means of putting a stop to his anger against the people of Israel ? inasmuch, that the Psalmist tells us, that *it was accounted to him for righteousness to all generations for e-*

vermore. I will recite the whole passage at large, because it is remarkable. When the people of Israel were seduced into idolatry and whoredom by the daughters of Moab, Phinehas in great zeal stood up and executed judgement upon Zimri and Cosbi in the very act; by which means the plague which was broken out upon the congregation of Israel, was presently staid. Hear what God says to Moses concerning this act of Phinehas. *The Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Phinehas the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, hath turned away my wrath from the children of Israel, (whilst he was zealous for my sake) that I consumed them not. Wherefore say, Behold, I give unto him my covenant of peace: and he shall have it, and his seed after him, even the covenant of an everlasting priesthood; because he was zealous for his God, and made an atonement for the children of Israel.* That which God takes so kindly at his hands, next to his zeal for him, is, that he pacified God's wrath towards the children of Israel.

And thus did God from time to time deal with the people of Israel, that great example of the Old Testament of the merciful methods of the divine providence towards a sinful nation; and an example, as St Paul tells us, 1 Cor. x. 11. *purposely recorded for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come.*

Let us therefore consider a little the astonishing patience of God towards that perverse people. After all the signs and wonders which he had wrought in their deliverance out of Egypt, and for their support in the wilderness, and notwithstanding their gross and stupid infidelity, and horrible ingratitude to God their Saviour, and all their rebellious murmurings and discontents; yet he suffered their manners for the space of forty years.

And when they were at last peaceably settled in the promised land, notwithstanding their frequent relapses into idolatry, with what patience did God expect their repentance, and the result of all the merciful messages and warnings given them from time to time by his prophets, as one that earnestly desired it, and even longed for it? Jer. iv. 14. *O Jerusalem, wash thine heart from wickedness, that thou mayest be saved: how long shall vain thoughts lodge within thee? that is, how long wilt thou*

thou delude thyself with vain hopes of escaping the judgments of God by any other way than by repentance? And again, Jer. xiii. 27. *O Jerusalem, wilt thou not be made clean? when shall it once be?* and, chap. viii. 6. says God there, *I hearkened and heard, but they spake not aright: no man repented him of his wickedness, saying, What have I done?* where God is represented, after the manner of men, waiting with great patience, as one that would have been glad to have heard any penitent word drop from them, to have seen any sign of their repentance, and return to a better mind.

And when they made some shews of repentance, and had some fits of good resolution that did presently vanish and come to nothing, how passionately does God complain of their fickleness and inconstancy? *O Ephraim, what shall I do unto thee? O Judah, what shall I do unto thee? for your goodness is as a morning cloud; and as the early dew it goeth away.*

And at last, when nothing would do, with what difficulty and reluctance does God deliver them up into the hands of their enemies? Hos. xi. 8. 9. *How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? how shall I deliver thee, Judah? how shall I make thee as Admah? how shall I set thee as Zeboim? mine heart is turned within me, and my repentings are kindled together. I will not execute the fierceness of mine anger, I will not destroy Ephraim.* What a conflict is here? what tendernefs and yearning of his bowels towards them? He cannot find in his heart to give them up, till he is forced to it by the last necessity.

And when the nation of the Jews, after their return from the captivity of Babylon, had in the course of several ages greatly corrupted themselves, and filled up the measure of their sins by *crucifying the Lord of life and glory*; yet how slow was the patience of God in bringing that fatal and final destruction upon them? Not till after the most merciful warnings given to them by the apostles of our Lord and Saviour; not till after the most obstinate impenitency of forty years, under the most powerful means of repentance that any people in the world ever enjoyed. I proceed to the

II. Second observation from the text, namely, What is the only proper and effectual means to prevent the
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ruin of a sinful people? And that is, if they will be instructed and take warning by the threatenings of God to become wiser and better, then *his soul will not depart from them*, and he will not bring upon them the desolation threatened: *Be thou instructed, O Jerusalem, lest my soul depart from thee, and I make thee desolate, a land not inhabited*; intimating, or rather plainly declaring to us, that if we will receive instruction and take warning, the evil threatened shall not come; for what other reason can there be, why God should threaten so long before he strikes, and so earnestly press men to repentance, but that he might have the opportunity to spare them, and to shew mercy to them?

And indeed, as I observed before, all the denunciations and threatenings of God to a sinful nation do carry this tacit condition in them, that if that nation turn from their evil ways, God will repent of the evil which he thought to do unto them. For God never passeth so irrevocable a sentence upon a nation, as to exclude the case of repentance: nay, on the contrary, he gives all imaginable encouragement to it, and is always ready to meet it with a pardon in his hand: *How often would I have gathered thee* (says our merciful Lord when he wept over Jerusalem) *as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not; therefore your house is left unto you desolate.*

God is very merciful to particular persons upon their repentance. When the prodigal son in the parable, after all his riot and lewdness, came to himself, and resolved to return home, *his father seeing him yet afar off coming towards him, came out to meet him, and had compassion on him, and kissed him.* And can any of us be so obstinate and hard-hearted, as not presently to resolve to repent and return, and to meet the compassions of such a father; who, after we have offended him to the uttermost, is, upon the first discovery of our repentance, ready to be as kind to us, as he could possibly have been if we had never offended him.

And much more is God ready to receive a nation upon their sincere repentance, when his judgements must needs make great havock, and so many are like to suffer under them. This consideration God urgeth and
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pleads with his froward prophet, in behalf of the great city of Nineveh, Jonah iv. 11. *And shall not I spare that great city of Nineveh, wherein are more than sixscore thousand persons, who cannot discern their right hand from their left?* that is, so many innocent children, by which we may judge of the vast number of the rest of the inhabitants. For this is a great consideration with God in his sending of public calamities, the multitude of the sufferers; and that not only the guilty, but the innocent also, without a special and miraculous providence, must be involved in a common calamity.

Sometimes God respites his judgements upon the mere external humiliation of a people, and some formal testimonies and expressions of their repentance. When the people of Israel sought God, and inquired early after him, though they did but flatter him with their mouth, and their heart was not right with him; yet the Psalmist tells us, Psal. lxxviii. *that being full of compassion, he forgave their iniquity, and destroyed them not*; that is, he forgave them so far as to respite their ruin.

And much more will a sincere and effectual repentance stay God's hand, and infallibly turn him from the fierceness of his anger; insomuch, that after he had fixed and determined the very day for the destruction of Nineveh, and had engaged the credit of his prophet in it; yet as soon as he saw their works, and that they turned from their evil ways, (and how glad was he to see it?) he presently repented of the evil which he had said he would do unto them, and he did it not. In this case God does not stand upon the reputation of his prophet, by whom he had sent so peremptory a message to them; but his mercy breaks through all considerations, and rejoiceth against judgement: for he cannot find in his heart to ruin those who, by the terror of his judgements, will be brought to repentance.

And this surely is a mighty motive and encouragement to repentance, to be assured that we shall find mercy; and that when our ruin is even decreed, and all the instruments of God's wrath are fixed and ready for execution, and his hand is just taking hold of vengeance, yet even then a sincere repentance will mitigate his hottest displeasure, and turn away his wrath. And if we will
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not come in upon these terms, we extort the judgements of God from him, and force him to depart from us, and with violent hands we pull down vengeance upon our own heads.

III. And lastly, The text intimates to us the miserable case and condition of a people when God takes off his heart and affection from them, when he gives over all further care and concernment for them, and abandons them to their own wickedness and folly, and to the miserable effects and consequences thereof: *Wo unto them, when his soul departs from them*; for then all sorts of evils and calamities will rush in, and *wrath will come upon them to the uttermost*; as was threatened to the Jews a little before their final destruction, and executed upon them in the most terrible and amazing manner that ever was from the foundation of the world. *These*, as our blessed Saviour expresses it, were *days of vengeance* indeed, *that all things which were written*, that is, foretold by Moses and the Prophets, concerning the fearful end of this perverse and stiff-necked people, *might be fulfilled*.

And because my text speaks to Jerusalem, *Be thou instructed, O Jerusalem, lest my soul depart from thee; lest I make thee desolate, a land not inhabited*; though this was spoken to Jerusalem before her captivity into Babylon; yet, because this first captivity was but a faint type of her last and final desolation by the Romans, when God's soul was indeed *departed from her*, and Judea was *left desolate, a land not inhabited*: I shall therefore briefly represent to you the full effect of this threatening in her last final destruction, when God's soul was, as it were, perfectly loosened and disjointed from her, that you may see what the fierceness and power of God's anger is, when *he departs from them*, and *wrath comes upon them to the uttermost*, because they would not be *instructed*, and *know the time of their visitation*.

Thus it was with the Jews, about forty years after the passion of our Lord, whom *with wicked hands they had crucified and slain*. Then was *God's soul departed from them*: then darkness and desolation came upon them; and they were in a far worse condition than a country would be that is forsaken of the sun, and left condemned to

to a perpetual night, in which darkness and disorder, faction and fury, do reign and rage; together with all the fatal consequences of zeal and strife, which, St James tells us, are *confusion, and every evil work*. For when God is once gone, all the good and happiness of mankind departs together with him: then men fall foul upon one another, divide into parties and factions, and execute the vengeance of God upon themselves with their own hands.

Thus it happened to the Jewish nation, when the measure of their iniquity was full, and their final ruin was approaching. And that we might know their fate, and be instructed by it, God provided and preserved a faithful historian on purpose, who was an eye-witness of all that befel them; I mean Josephus, who was personally engaged, and was a considerable commander in the wars of the Jews with the Romans, before the siege of Jerusalem; and during the siege, was present in the Roman camp; and, being a Jew himself, hath transmitted these things to posterity, in a most exact and admirable history; such a history, as no man that hath the heart and bowels of a man can read without the greatest pity and astonishment.

In the preface of that lamentable history, he tells us, that “all the misfortunes and calamities which the world, “from the beginning of it had seen, compared with this “last calamity of the Jewish nation, were but slight and “inconsiderable.” He tells us likewise, that their civil dissensions were the next and immediate cause of their confusion and ruin.

And this more than once: for when Pompey, about sixty years before our Saviour's birth, sat down before Jerusalem, he tells us, (*l. 1. c. 3.*), that the factions and divisions which they had among themselves, were the cause of the taking the city and temple at that time; and when they rebelled afterwards, that the heads of their factions provoked the Romans, and brought them unwillingly upon them, and at last forced the best-natured prince in the world, Titus Vespasian, to that severity which he most earnestly desired by all means to have prevented. And he further tells us, (*l. 4. c. 5.*), that even before the siege of Jerusalem, the cities of Judea had all of them civil discords among themselves, and
that

that in every city one part of the Jews fought against another.

And when Jerufalem began to be besieged, what a miserable condition was it in, by the cruelty of the zealots under the command of John the son of Giorah? And, presently after, another faction arose under Simon, who entered into the city with a fresh force, and assaulted the zealots in the temple: so that most miserable havock was made between them. And then a third faction started up under Eleazar, as bad as either of the other, (*l. 7. c. 1.*). So that infinite almost were the numbers of the people within the city, that were barbarously slain by these seditions.

And what an infatuation was this, when the enemy was at the gates, and ready to break in upon them, to employ their whole strength and force against one another; when the same courage and fury, which they spent so freely upon themselves, had it been turned with the like desperateness and obstinacy upon the Romans, might have endangered the whole force of the Roman empire? Once or twice indeed, they seemed to lay aside their enmity for a little while, and to unite in the common defence; but as soon as the danger of a present assault was over, they relapsed into their former state of intestine enmity and dissention, as if that had been their main business, and the preservation of their city against the Romans only a work by the by, and not much to be regarded.

And to add to all their other miseries, they were so blinded by their own rage and madness, that they wilfully brought upon themselves an extreme famine. For, as the historian tells us, they themselves set on fire vast stores of corn and other necessaries, sufficient to have served them for many years: and by this means the city was much sooner reduced, even by a famine of their own making, and which could not have been brought upon them but by themselves.

This famine, besides all the other miseries and cruelties which it occasioned within the city, did force great numbers of them to steal out by night into the Roman camp; where they met with as cruel, but a speedier death. For Titus, in hopes to reduce them the sooner
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by terror, ordered all those that came out of the city to be crucified before the walls: which order was so severely executed, that for several days five hundred a-day were crucified, till there was neither room left to place crosses in, nor wood whereof to make them. So that they who once cried out so vehemently against our Saviour, *Crucify him, crucify him*, had enough of it at last, and by the just and most remarkable judgements of God, were paid home in their own kind.

Behold the sad fate of a sinful people, when God is departed from them! Then all evils overtake them at once. For, as their misery increased, so did their impiety, to that degree, that the historian tells us, (*l. 5. c. 2.*), “they scorned and mocked at all divine and holy things;” “and derided the oracles of the Prophets, esteeming them no better than fables;” and in a word, were carried to that extremity of wickedness, as not only to profane their temple in the highest manner, and to break the laws of their own religion, but even to violate the laws of nature and humanity in the grossest instances: which made their historian give that dismal character of them, (*l. 6. c. 11.*), that, “as he thought no city ever suffered such things, so no nation, from the beginning of the world, did ever so abound in all manner of wickedness and impiety:” A certain sign that *God’s soul was departed from them.*

And the same historian afterwards, upon consideration of the lamentable state into which their seditions had brought them, breaks out into this doleful lamentation over them, (*l. 7. c. 1.*), “O miserable city! what didst thou suffer from the Romans? tho’ at last they set thee on fire to purge thee from thy sins, what is to be compared with those miseries which thou hast brought upon thyself?”

To such a dismal state did things come at last, that, as the same historian relates, “many of the Jews prayed for the good success of their enemies, to deliver them from their civil dissensions; the calamity whereof was so great, that their final destruction by the Romans did rather put an end to their misery than increase it.”

— *En quo discordia cives
Perduxit miseros !* —

To conclude this sad story : It was the Jews themselves that by their own folly and dissensions forced the Romans to this sorrowful victory over them ; for in truth all the remorse and pity was on the enemy's side. The Romans were little more than spectators in this cruel tragedy ; the Jews acted it upon themselves : and they only who were arrived at that prodigious height of impiety and wickedness, were fit to be the executioners of this vengeance of God upon one another : as if the Prophet had foretold this, when he says, *Thine own wickedness shall correct thee*, Jer. ii. 19.

When impiety and wickedness are at their highest pitch in a nation, then they themselves are the only proper instruments to punish one another. The Romans were by far too good and gentle to inflict a suffering upon the Jews that was equal to the evil of their doings : none but their own barbarous selves, who were sunk down into the very lowest degeneracy of human nature, were capable of so much cruelty and inhumanity, as was requisite to execute the judgement of God upon them to that degree which their sins had deserved.

You see, my brethren, by what hath been said upon this argument, what were the faults, and what the fate, of the Jewish nation. Now, *these things* (as the Apostle expressly tells us) *were written for our admonition*, and to the intent that *we, upon whom the ends of the world are come*, might be instructed by them : We, I say, who next to the Jewish nation seem to be a people highly favoured by God above all the nations of the earth. We resemble them very much in their many and wonderful deliverances, and a great deal too much in their faults and follies.

But as I intend it not, so God forbid, that there should be any just ground for a full and exact parallel between us. Yet this I must say, that nothing ever came nearer to them than we do, in several respects ; in our fickleness and inconstancy, in our murmurings and discontents ; for we are never pleased with what God does,
neither

neither when he brings us into danger, nor when he delivers us out of it. We resemble them likewise in our horrible profaneness and infidelity, and in our impiety and wickedness of several kinds; in our monstrous ingratitude, and most unworthy returns to the God of our salvation; and, lastly, in our factions and divisions, which were the fatal sign of God's being departed from the Jews, and the immediate cause and means of those dismal calamities which wrought their final ruin. And how can we chuse but dread, lest their fate should overtake us, the example of whose faults and follies we do in so many things so nearly resemble?

That this may not, nor any thing like it, be our fate, let us apply ourselves to the great duties of this day; a serious and deep repentance and humiliation of ourselves before Almighty God, for the many and heinous sins which we in this nation have been, and still are guilty of against his Divine Majesty; by our profaneness and impiety, by our lewdness and luxury, by our oppression and injustice, by our implacable malice and hatred one towards another, and by our senseless divisions and animosities one against another, without cause and without end; by our neglect of God's worship, and profanation of his holy day; and by our dreadful abuse of God's great and glorious name in those horrid oaths, and curses, and imprecations, which are heard almost day and night in the streets of this great city.

For these, and all other our innumerable provocations of the patience, and goodness, and long-suffering of God towards us, let us sadly repent ourselves this day; and *turn unto the Lord with all our hearts, with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning: and rent our hearts, and not our garments, and turn unto the Lord our God; for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil: and who knoweth if he will return and repent, and leave a blessing behind him? Turn thou us unto thee, O Lord, and we shall be turned. Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously.*

And let us earnestly beg of him, that he would be pleased to prevent those terrible judgements and calamities which hang over us, and which our sins have so justly deserved should fall upon us; and that he would

perfect that wonderful deliverance which he hath begun for us, and *establisth the thing which he hath wrought* : that he would bless them whom he hath set in authority over us ; and particularly, that he would preserve the person of the King in his present expedition, and crown him with victory and good success.

And to our repentance and prayers let us add our liberal alms ; and, according to the counsel given by the Prophet to Nebuchadnezzar, let us *break off our sins by righteousness, and our iniquities by shewing mercy to the poor, if so be it may be a lengthening of our tranquillity*.

We are yet, blessed be God, in the full enjoyment of peace and quiet at home, and of our religion and civil liberties. God hath given us two excellent princes sitting on the throne together, and both of the same religion with the main body of the nation ; and as bright examples of piety and goodness as England ever saw ; and who do by all ways and means study and seek the good of the people committed to their charge.

So that if we did but know our own happiness, and how to value it, we might be the happiest people this day under heaven. And yet, for all this, we are very far from being happy ; because we are neither contented, nor united ; and though we have all the materials of happiness about us, and within our reach, yet have we not the skill and wisdom to put them together.

Miserable people ! that may be happy and will not ; whom neither so fresh a deliverance from so great a danger as was just ready to have swallowed us up, nor the fear and apprehension of falling again into the like confusion, can be a warning to us from returning again into the same folly. For those odious and unhappy names of difference which some years ago sprang up among us, the devil knows how, did seem, whilst a common danger threatened us, to be quite dead and buried ; but no sooner was the danger over, but, by a kind of miraculous infatuation, behold a sudden resurrection of them, with greater heats and animosities, if possible, than before : Just as it was with the Jews in the siege of Jerusalem, when the Romans had made a wide breach, and the city was furiously assaulted, the factions then gave truce to one another, and ran in to the common defence ;
but

but as soon as ever the danger was a little over, they fell on a fresh, and prosecuted their main design of destroying one another.

And now that the danger is a little over with us also, how like a fate upon us does it look, that we are so soon altered from our wiser and better temper? Did we well and wisely before our late happy revolution, when we united for our common defence against a common danger, and did let those unlucky names of distinction fall, so that they seemed to be quite extinguished? and can it be now wise to revive them, and to take them up again, when the same danger, in some degree, and from the same implacable enemies, still hovers over us? No, surely; it would not be wise, if the danger were quite past and over: but when it still remains, and threatens us, what greater folly and infatuation can there be, than still to divide and quarrel among ourselves? Will nothing but sad and bitter experience be an admonition to us? Will nothing but the last necessity, and extremity of things, bring us to ourselves, and teach us wisdom?

Methinks we should all now be glad to be at rest, after the tedious troubles and distractions, the fruitless quarrels and divisions of fifty years. So long I remember; and in all that space how very few years passed over us without some great calamity and dismal event? So that, by this time, one would think we should all be sick of our own follies, and so tired with our unprofitable feuds and dissensions, as to make both sides look about them, to see if any body will take pity on us, and step in to part our quarrels.

And now I begin to be sensible, that I have engaged in a tender point indeed, and do feel myself standing upon a very slippery place. For who is fit to interpose in such hot and fierce differences? who can do it without danger, or with any hopes of success? and yet *for Zion's sake I will not hold my peace, for Jerusalem's sake I will not keep silence.* Of so great consequence is it to the peace and happiness of this church and nation, that these names and distinctions of parties should be laid down, and abolished for ever.

In order whereunto I take it for granted, and lay it for a principle, that he who hopes to persuade both sides,

must provoke neither ; and therefore I will not so much as inquire where the fault lies. It is in these civil differences, as in family-quarrels between man and wife, if any man ask, on which side lies the fault ? one may almost safely answer at a venture, on both sides. It must indeed begin on one ; but if it be not presently healed, and made up, the other party is always so civil, as to run in and take a share of the fault, that all the blame may not lie wholly on one side.

And, now, my brethren, let me for once persuade and prevail with you for your good ; let me be so happy, as to say something that may sink into your hearts, and incline your minds to peace and good agreement with one another. *Have salt in yourselves*, (says our blessed Saviour, the great peace-maker), *and peace one with another*. By *salt* is meant grace and spiritual wisdom ; and if that do but rule and sway in our hearts, we shall then endeavour, *if it be possible, and as much as in us lies, to live peaceably with all men*. If we *have salt in ourselves*, that is, if we be wise, we will then certainly *have peace one with another*.

And if we were but once come to this healing temper, in this divided and distracted nation, we should not then need to fear *all the power of the enemy*. And this our enemies know full well : and therefore their chief policy and wisdom is, and ever hath been, to divide us ; and it will be our own great folly and weakness, if we suffer ourselves to be divided : for who that is wise will take counsel and advice from an enemy ? But if we could agree, and hold together, then our Jerusalem would be *as a city that is compact together*, strong and impregnable. Let us then *be instructed, and know in this our day the things which belong to our peace, before they be hid from our eyes*. And let us all earnestly endeavour, *and pray for the peace of Jerusalem*. *They shall prosper that love her*, says the Psalmist, Psal. cxxii. and they do not love her, that do not seek her peace, and endeavour by all means to procure it : *That peace may be within her walls, and prosperity within her palaces*. The one cannot be without the other ; without peace there can be no prosperity. And to go on with the words of the Psalmist, let every one of us say, yea let us all with one heart and voice

voice say, *For our brethren and companions sake*, for the sake of our Protestant brethren all the world over, let us say, *Peace be within thee. For the house of the Lord our God*, for the sake of our holy religion, and of that excellent church whereof we all are, or ought to be members, let every one of us say, *I will seek thy good.*

And what greater good can we do to the best religion, how can we better serve the interest of it in all parts of the world, than by being at peace and unity amongst ourselves here in England; upon whom the eyes of all the Protestants abroad are fixed, as the glory of the reformation, and the great bulwark and support of it?

That so, under the providence of Almighty God, and the conduct of two such excellent princes as he hath now blessed us withal; the one so brave and valiant, and both of them so wise, so good, so religious, we may at last arrive at a firm establishment, and become *like mount Zion that cannot be moved, the perfection of beauty and strength, and the admiration and joy of the whole earth.* Which God of his infinite goodness grant, for his mercies sake in Jesus Christ. To whom, with thee, O Father, and the Holy Ghost, be all honour and glory, dominion and power, thanksgiving and praise, both now and ever. *Amen.*

S E R M O N XXXVIII.

A conscience void of offence towards God and men.

Preached before the Queen, at Whitehall, Feb. 27. 1690.

ACTS xxiv. 16.

And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men.

THese words are part of the defence which St Paul made for himself before Felix the Roman governor. In which he first of all vindicates himself from the charge

charge of sedition, ver. 12. *They neither found me in the temple disputing with any man; neither raising up the people, neither in the synagogue, nor in the city; that is, they could not charge him with making any disturbance either in church or state.*

After this he makes a free and open profession of his religion, ver. 14. *But this I confess, that after the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the law and the prophets.* Here he declares the scriptures to be the rule of his faith, in opposition to the oral tradition of the Pharisees.

More particularly he asserts the doctrine of the resurrection, which was a principal article both of the Jewish and the Christian religion, ver. 15. *And I have hope also towards God, that there shall be a resurrection, both of the just and the unjust.*

And having made this declaration of his faith, he gives an account of his life in the words of the text, ver. 16. *And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men.*

Herein, ἐν τούτῳ, that is, *in this work*, do I employ myself; or, as others render it, *in the mean time*, whilst I am in this world; or, as others, I think most probably, *for this cause and reason*, ἐν τούτῳ for διὰ τοῦτο, *for this reason*; because I believe a resurrection, therefore have I a conscientious care of my life, and all the actions of it.

The discourse I intend to make upon these words, shall be comprised in these following particulars.

1. Here is the extent of a good man's pious practice, *to have a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men.*

2. Here is his constancy and perseverance in this course, *to have ALWAYS a conscience void of offence.*

3. Here is his earnest care and endeavour to this purpose, *I exercise myself.*

4. Here is the principle and immediate guide of his actions, which St Paul here tells us was his *conscience.*

5. I shall lay down some rules and directions for the keeping of a good conscience.

6. Here

6. Here is the great motive and encouragement to this, which St Paul tells us was the belief of a resurrection, and of a future state of rewards and punishments consequent upon it: *For this cause, because, I hope for a resurrection both of the just and unjust, I exercise myself to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men.* I shall speak but briefly to the three first of these particulars, that I may be larger in the rest.

I. Here is the extent of a good man's pious practice. It hath regard to the whole compass of his duty, as it respects God and man: *I exercise myself, (says St Paul), to have a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men.* And this distribution of our duty under these two general heads, is very frequent in scripture. The decalogue refers our duty to these two heads: and accordingly our Saviour comprehends the whole duty of man in these two great commandments, the *love of God*, and of our *neighbour*, Matth. xxii. 38. *Upon these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets; that is, all the moral precepts which are dispersed up and down in the law and the prophets, may be referred to these two general heads.*

II. Here is his constancy and perseverance in this course. St Paul says, that he *exercised himself to have ALWAYS a conscience void of offence; διαπαντός, continually; at all times; in the whole course of his life.* We must not only make conscience of our ways by fits and starts, but in the general course and tenor of our lives and actions, without any balks and intermissions.

There are some that will refrain from grosser sins, and be very strict at some seasons; as during the time of a solemn repentance, and for some days before they receive the sacrament; and perhaps for a little while after it: and when these devout seasons are over, they let themselves loose again to their former lewd and vicious course. But religion should be a constant frame and temper of mind, discovering itself in the habitual course of our lives and actions.

III. Here is likewise a very earnest care and endeavour to this purpose. Herein do *I exercise myself*, says St Paul. The word *ἀσκῶ*, which is here rendered *exercise*, is a word of a very intense signification, and does denote,

note, that St Paul applied himself to this business with all his care and might, and that he made it his earnest study and endeavour. And so must we; we must take great care to understand our duty, and to be rightly informed concerning good and evil, that we may not mistake the nature of things, and *call good evil, and evil good*: we must apply our minds in good earnest to be thoroughly instructed in all the parts of our duty, that so we may not be at a loss what to do when we are called to the practice of it. And when we know our duty, we must be true and honest to ourselves, and very careful and conscientious in the discharge and performance of it. I proceed, in the

IV. Fourth place, to consider the principle and immediate guide of our actions, which St Paul here tells us was his *conscience*: *I exercise myself to have always a conscience void of offence*. By which he does not only mean a resolution to follow the dictate and direction of his conscience, but likewise a due care to inform his conscience aright, that he might not in any thing transgress the law of God, and his duty.

Conscience is the great principle of moral actions, and our guide in matter of sin and duty. It is not the law and rule of our actions; that the law of God only is: but it is our immediate guide and director, telling us what is the law of God, and our duty.

But because *conscience* is a word of a very large and various signification, I shall endeavour very briefly to give you the true notion of it. Now, in common speech concerning conscience, every man is represented as having a kind of court and tribunal in his own breast, where he tries himself, and all his actions. And conscience, under one notion or other, sustains all parts in this trial: the court is called *the court of a man's conscience*, and the bar at which the sinner stands impleaded, is called *the bar of conscience*: conscience also is the accuser; and it is the record and register of our crimes, in which the memory of them is preserved: and it is the witness which gives testimony for or against us; hence are those expressions of *the testimony of our consciences*, and that “a man's own” conscience is to him instead of a thousand witnesses.” And it is likewise the judge, which declares the law, and what

what we ought, or ought not to have done, in such or such a case: and accordingly passeth sentence upon us, by acquitting or condemning us. Thus, according to common use of speech, conscience sustains all imaginable parts in this spiritual court: it is the court, and the bench, and the bar; the accuser, and witness, and register, and all.

But I shall only at present consider conscience in the most common and famous notion of it, as it is the principle or faculty whereby we judge of moral good and evil, and do accordingly direct and govern our actions. So that, in short, conscience is nothing else but the judgement of a man's own mind concerning the morality of his actions; that is, the good, or evil, or indifference of them; telling us what things are commanded by God, and consequently are our duty; what things are forbidden by him, and consequently are sinful; what things are neither commanded nor forbidden, and consequently are indifferent. I proceed, in the

V. Fifth place, To give some rules and directions for the keeping of a conscience void of offence. And they shall be these following.

1. Never in any case to act contrary to the persuasion and conviction of our conscience: for that certainly is a great sin, and that which properly offends the conscience, and renders us guilty; guilt being nothing else but trouble arising in our minds from a consciousness of having done contrary to what we are verily persuaded was our duty: and though perhaps this persuasion is not always well grounded, yet the guilt is the same so long as this persuasion continues; because every man's conscience is a kind of God to him, and accuseth or absolves him according to the present persuasion of it. And therefore we ought to take great care not to offend against the light and conviction of our own mind.

2. We should be very careful to inform our consciences aright, that we may not mistake concerning our duty; or if we do, that our error and mistake may not be grossly wilful and faulty.

And this rule is the more necessary to be considered and regarded by us, because generally men are apt to think it a sufficient excuse for any thing, that they did it according

according to their conscience. But this will appear to be a dangerous mistake, and of very pernicious consequence to the souls of men, if we consider these two things.

1. That men may be guilty of the most heinous sins in following an erroneous conscience.

2. And these sins may prove damnable without a particular repentance for them.

1st, That men may be guilty of the most heinous sins in following an erroneous conscience. Men may neglect and abuse themselves so far, as to do some of the worst and wickedest things in the world, with a persuasion that they do well. Our Saviour tells his disciples, John xvi. 2. that *the time should come when the Jews should put them to death, thinking they did God good service.* Nay, the Jews murdered the Son of God himself through ignorance and a false persuasion of mind: *Father, forgive them,* (says our blessed Lord, when he was breathing out his soul upon the cross, Luke xxiii. 34.) *for they know not what they do.* And St Peter, after he had charged the Jews with *killing the prince of life*, he presently adds, *I wot that through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers,* Acts iii. 17. And St Paul, in mitigation of that great crime says, *Had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of life and glory.* And concerning himself he tells us, Acts xxvi. 9. that *he verily thought with himself, that he ought to do many things against the name of Jesus of Nazareth*: and yet, notwithstanding that he acted herein according to the persuasion of his conscience, he tells us, that he had been *a blasphemer, and a persecuter, and injurious, and a murderer, and, in a word, the greatest of sinners.* So that men may be guilty of the greatest sins in following an erroneous conscience. And,

2^{dly}, These sins may prove damnable, without a particular repentance for them. Where the ignorance and mistake is not grossly wilful, there God will accept of a general repentance; but where it is grossly wilful, great sins committed upon it are not pardoned without a particular repentance for them. And an error which proceeds from want of ordinary human care, and due government of a man's self, is in a great degree wilful: as
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when it proceeds from an unreasonable and obstinate prejudice, from great pride and self conceit, and contempt of counsel and instruction ; or from a visible bias of self-interest ; or when it is accompanied with a furious passion and zeal, prompting men to cruel and horrible things, contrary to the light of nature, and the common sense of humanity. An error proceeding from such causes, and producing such effects, is wilful in so high a degree, that whatever evil is done in virtue of it, is almost equally faulty with a direct and wilful violation of the law of God.

The ignorance and mistake doth indeed make the person so mistaken more capable of forgiveness ; which is the ground of our Saviour's prayer for his murderers, *Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.* St Paul likewise tells us, that he found mercy upon this account : *Nevertheless* (says he, 1 Tim. i. 13.) *I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly, and in unbelief ;* that is, through a false persuasion of mind, not believing it to be a sin ; and yet he did not obtain this mercy, without a particular conviction of his fault, and repentance for it. And St Peter, after he had convinced the Jews of their great sin in crucifying Christ, though they did it ignorantly, yet he exhorts them to a particular and deep repentance for it, as necessary to the pardon and forgiveness of it : and therefore, after he had said, *I wot that through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers,* he immediately adds, Acts iii. 19. *Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out.*

So that it highly concerns men to consider what opinions they embrace in order to practice, and not to suffer themselves to be hurried away by an unreasonable prejudice, and a heady passion, without a due and calm examination of things ; not to be overborn by pride, or humour, or partiality, or interest, or by a furious and extravagant zeal ; because proportionably to the voluntariness of our error, will be the guilt of our practice pursuant to that error. Indeed where our error is involuntary, and morally invincible, God will consider it, and make allowance for it ; but where it is voluntary, and occasioned by our own gross faults and neglect, we are bound to consider, and rectify our mistake : for what-

ever we do contrary to the law of God and our duty, in virtue of that false persuasion, we do it at our utmost peril, and must be answerable to God for it, notwithstanding we did it according to the dictate of our conscience.

3. A third rule is this, That in all doubts of conscience we endeavour to be equal and impartial, and do not lay all the weight of our doubts on one side, when there is perhaps as much or greater reason of doubting on the other; and consequently that we be as tractable, and easy to receive satisfaction of our doubts, in one kind as in another, and be equally contented to have them over-ruled in cases that are equal; I mean, where our passions and interests are not concerned, as well as where they are. And if we do not do this, it is a sign that we are partial in our pretences of conscience; and that we do not aim merely at the peace and satisfaction of our own minds, but have some other interest and design.

For it is a very suspicious thing, when mens doubts and scruples bear all on one side; especially if it be on that side which is against charity, and peace, and obedience to government, whether ecclesiastical or civil: in this case I think, that a mere doubt, and much more a scruple, may, nay, ought in reason to be over-ruled by the command of authority, by the opinion and judgement of wise and good men, and in consideration of the public peace, and of the unity and edification of the church.

Not that a man is in any case to go against the clear persuasion and conviction of his own mind: but when there is only a mere doubt concerning the lawfulness or unlawfulness of a thing, it seems to me in that case very reasonable, that a man should suffer a mere doubt or scruple to be over-ruled by any of those weighty considerations which I have mentioned before.

4. The fourth rule is, That all pretences of conscience are vehemently to be suspected, which are accompanied with turbulent passion and a furious zeal. It is an hundred to one but such a man's conscience is in the wrong. It is an excellent saying of St James, chap. i. 20. *The wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God*; that is, the fierce passions of men are no proper instruments to promote religion, and to accomplish

plish any thing that is good. And therefore, if any man be transported with a wild zeal, and pretend conscience for his fury, it is great odds but he is in an error. None are so likely to judge amiss, as they whose minds are clouded and blinded by their passions.

*Nubila mens est,
Hæc ubi regnant.*

Boeth.

And if men would carefully observe themselves, they might almost certainly know when they act upon reason, and a true principle of conscience. A good conscience is easy to itself, and pleased with its own doings; but when a man's passion and discontent are a weight upon his judgement, and do as it were bear down his conscience to a compliance, no wonder if this puts a man's mind into a very unnatural and uneasy state.

There can hardly be a broader sign that a man is in the wrong, than to rage and be confident; because this plainly shews, that the man's conscience is not settled upon clear reason, but that he hath brought over his conscience to his interest, or to his humour and discontent.

And though such a man may be so far blinded by his passion, as not to see what is right; yet methinks he should feel himself to be in the wrong, by his being so very hot and impatient.

Art thou sure thou art in the right? thou art a happy man, and hast reason to be pleased: what cause then, what need is there of being angry? Hath a man reason on his side? what would he have more? why then does he fly out into passion? which as it gives no strength to a bad argument, so I could never yet see that it was any grace and advantage to a good one.

Of the great evil and the perpetual mistake of this furious kind of zeal, the Jews are a lively and a lamentable example, in their carriage towards our blessed Saviour and his apostles: and more particularly St Paul, when he persecuted the Christians from a false and erroneous persuasion of his conscience. Hear how St Paul describes himself and his own doings whilst he was acted by an erroneous conscience: Acts xxii. 4. *I persecuted* (says he) *this way unto the death, binding and delivering in-*

to prisons both men and women ; and, in another chapter, Acts xxvi. 9. *I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things against the name of Jesus of Nazareth.* Here was his erroneous conscience. Let us next see what were the unhappy concomitants and effects of it : ver. 10. 11. *Which things (says he) I also did in Jerusalem : and many of the saints I shut up in prison ; and when they were put to death I gave my voice against them, and punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme ; and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even to strange cities.* When conscience transports men with such a furious zeal and passion, it is hardly ever in the right ; or, if it should happen to be so, they who are thus transported, by their ungracious way of maintaining the truth, and their ill management of a good cause, have found out a cunning way to be in the wrong, even when they are in the right.

5. All pretences of conscience are likewise to be suspected, which are not accompanied with modesty and humility, and a teachable temper and disposition, willing to learn and to be better informed. A proud and conceited temper of mind is very likely to run into mistakes ; because pride, and fulness of a man's self, does keep out knowledge, and obstructs all the passages by which wisdom and instruction should enter into men. Besides that it provokes God to abandon men to their own follies and mistakes : for *God resisteth the proud ; but the meek will be guide in judgement, and will give more grace and wisdom to the humble.* When men are once come to this, to think themselves wiser than their teachers, and to despise and cast off their guides, no wonder if then they go astray.

6. Lastly, Let us be sure to mind that which is our plain and unquestionable duty, the great things of religion, wherein the life and substance of it doth consist ; and *the things likewise which make for peace, and whereby we may edify one another :* and let us not suffer our disputes about lesser matters to prejudice and hinder our main duty : but let it be our great care, not to fail in those greater things, which are comprehended under the *two great commandments of the law, the love of God, and of our neighbour.* Let us be strict and constant in our
piety

piety and devotion towards God ; chaste and temperate in reference to ourselves ; just and honest, kind and charitable, humble and meek, patient and peaceable, towards all men ; submissive and obedient towards our superiors, natural, civil, and spiritual. A due regard to these great virtues of the Christian life, is the way to *keep a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men.* And surely the best means to have our doubts cleared about matters of lesser moment in religion, is, heartily to set about the practice of the great and unquestionable duties of it. So our blessed Saviour hath assured us, that *if any man will do the will of God, he shall know of his doctrine whether it be of God,* John vii. 17. I come now, in the

VI. Sixth and last place, to consider the great motive and encouragement to this conscientious care of our lives and actions ; which St Paul here tells us was, his belief of a resurrection, and of the rewards and punishments consequent upon it : *I have hope* (says he) *towards God, that there shall be a resurrection both of the just and unjust ; for this cause, therefore, I exercise myself to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men.*

If we believe the resurrection of the dead and a future judgement, we ought to be very careful to discharge a good conscience now, in order to the rendering of a good account hereafter ; that *we may be sincere and without offence, with respect to the day of Christ,* as the Apostle expresseth it. For when that great day of recompences shall come, we shall most assuredly find, that nothing will then raise our hearts, and make us to lift up our heads with joy, like the witnesses of a good conscience : and therefore we should make that our constant care and companion now, which will then be our great comfort and rejoicing, a good conscience, and *the testimony of it, that in all simplicity and godly sincerity we have had our conversation in the world.*

And, on the contrary, when we come to appear before the great judge of the world, nothing will fill our minds with so much terror, and our faces with so much confusion, as the clamorous accusations of a guilty conscience ; which will be more than a thousand witnesses against us, and will anticipate our condemnation, and

pass almost as severe a sentence upon us as the judge himself can.

This is that which will make the sinner to droop, and to hang down his head for ever. And one of the principal ingredients of his misery and torment will be, the perpetual regret and remorse of his own mind for his wilful wickedness and folly; which will kindle a fire within him as hot as that without him, and as hard to be quenched.

This consideration ought to have a mighty operation upon us, to make us very careful to have consciences void of offence now, that they may be free from torment and anguish hereafter; that when we shall come into the other world, we may not be eternally displeased with ourselves, and enraged at our own doings; but may carry with us thither consciences clear of all guilt, either by innocency, or by repentance.

The firm belief of a future state of eternal happiness or misery in another world, is the great weight or spring that sets a-going those two powerful principles of human activity, the hopes and the fears of men; and is in its nature so fitted to raise these passions to that degree, that, did not experience shew us the contrary, one would think it morally impossible for human nature to resist the mighty force of it.

All men are sensible, more or less, at one time or other, of the true force of these arguments; but the mischief is, that in some persons they work quite the wrong way; and, instead of leading men to repentance, they drive them to infidelity. They cannot deny the force of these arguments, if they were true; but, that they may avoid the force of them, they will not believe them to be true. And so far they are in the right, that, granting these things to be true, they cannot but acknowledge that they ought to live otherwise than they do. But here is their fatal miscarriage, that being resolved upon an evil course, since they cannot reconcile their practice with such principles as these, they will fit their principles to their practice; and so they will believe nothing at all of the rewards and punishments of another world, lest this should disturb them in their course. Vain men! as if heaven and hell must needs
vanish

vanish and disappear, because some witty, but wicked men, have no mind to believe them.

These men are infidels in their own defence, and merely for the quiet of their own minds, that their consciences may not perpetually rate them, and fly in their faces. For a right belief, and an evil conscience, are but unfuitable companions: they are quarrelsome neighbours, and must needs live very uneasily by one another. He that believes the principles of religion, and yet is conscious to himself, that he hath lived contrary to them, and still continues to do so, how can he possibly have any peace and quiet in his mind; unless, like Jonah, he can sleep in a storm, and his conscience be, as it were, *seared with a hot iron*? for if his conscience be awake, and in any degree sensible, the evident danger of eternal ruin continually hanging over him, must in reason either drive him to repentance or to despair. If so forcible and violent an argument can make no impression upon us, we are stupid and bewitched, we are lost and undone, we are wretched and miserable for ever.

But, besides the future reward of a holy and conscientious course, which is *unspeakable and full of glory*; it hath also this present fruit, this earnest, as I may say, and ready money in hand, the peace and satisfaction of our own minds, which is much more valuable than *thousands of gold and silver*; the unspeakable comfort whereof every man will then find when he hath most need of it: for it will be matter of great joy to him, not only under the sorest afflictions and calamities of life, but even at the hour of death; when the miseries of life oppress him, and the sorrows of death compass him about, and the pangs of it are ready to take hold of him.

There is certainly no such comfort under the evils and afflictions of this life, as a faithful witness in our breasts of our own innocency and integrity. When we are afflicted by God, or persecuted and reviled by men, it cannot but be a mighty consolation to us, to be conscious to ourselves of our own sincerity. For though no man can acquit and justify himself before God as to the perfect innocency of his life, in which sense St Paul says, 1 Cor. iv. 4. that *though he knew nothing by himself, yet was he not thereby justified*; I say, though no man can
plead

plead perfect innocency, yet, as to the general course and tenor of an unblameable life, a good man may appeal to God, and even when he afflicts him, may look upon him as a tender and compassionate father, and not as an angry and revengeful judge.

With this, holy and patient Job, under all those terrible disasters and calamities which befel him, was able in some measure to comfort himself. After he had lost all, and he had a great deal to lose; when he was forsaken of all other comfort, even the charitable opinion of his best friends concerning his sincerity; in these sad and disconsolate circumstances, what was it that bore up his spirits? Nothing but the conscience of his own integrity. See with what resolution and constancy of mind he asserts and maintains it: Job xxvii. 5. 6. *I will not (says he) remove mine integrity from me. My righteousness will I hold fast, and will not let it go; mine heart shall not reproach me so long as I live.* You see, that when every thing else was gone, his integrity stuck by him and supported him to the last.

And as to persecutions and sufferings from men, our own innocency, and the goodness of our cause, will be our best comfort under them; when we are not guilty to ourselves, that we have deserved them from men, and are inwardly assured, that whatever we patiently suffer for God and a good conscience, will all turn to our account another day, and *work for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.*

This was that which supported the first Christians, that noble army of martyrs, under all those bitter and cruel persecutions, which had otherwise been beyond all human patience to have endured; this comforted them in all their tribulations; *Our rejoicing (says St Paul) is this, the testimony of our consciences, that in simplicity and godly sincerity we have had our conversation in the world.*

So likewise under that inferior, but equally malicious sort of persecution, of which this age is so very profuse and prodigal; I mean, the causeless calumnies and reproaches of men: if under these we can but approve our consciences to God, the charitable censures of men are not so much to be regarded by us. Some impression they will make upon a tender mind; but we must not, if we can

can help it, let them sink too deep into our spirits. *If our hearts condemn us not, we may have confidence towards God, 1 John iii. 21.; and then surely much more towards men.* If God and our own consciences do but acquit us, methinks it should be no such difficult matter to bear the flanders and hard censures of men.

But, above all other times, the comfort of a good conscience is most sensible and most considerable at the hour of death! For as nothing dejects a man's spirits more, and sends him down with so much sorrow to the grave, as the guilt of an evil conscience; what terror and anguish, what rage and despair, do seize upon a sinner at that time, when he reflects upon what he hath done, and considers what he is like to suffer? so, on the other hand, there is nothing that revives and raises the fainting spirits of a dying man, like the conscience of a holy and useful life, which hath brought glory to God, and good to men. *The wicked* (says Solomon, Prov. xiv. 32.) *is driven away in his wickedness*; that is, he is carried out of the world, as it were, in a storm and tempest: *but the righteous hath hope in his death*; he usually dies calmly and comfortably. *Mark the perfect man*, (says David, Psal. xxxvii. 37.), *and behold the upright; for the end of that man is peace.*

If a man be conscious to himself, that he hath sincerely endeavoured to keep the commandments of God, and to do the things which please him; if he hath lived inoffensively, and, as St Paul (Acts xxiii. 1.) says of himself, *in all good conscience before God and men*; what an unspeakable consolation must it be to him, in that dark and gloomy time, and when he is *walking through the valley of the shadow of death*, then *to fear no evil*? and to be able, with our blessed Saviour, to say, though in a much inferior measure and degree, *Father, I have glorified thee on the earth; I have finished the work which thou hast given me to do?* John xvii. 4.; and to be able to look death in the face with the like courage and constancy of mind, as St Paul did when he saw it approaching towards him: *I am now* (say he, 2 Tim. iv. 6. 7. 8.) *ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord the righteous judge shall give*

give me at that day? A comfortable death, that is free from the stings and upbraidings, the terrors and tortures, the confusion and amazement, of a guilty conscience, is a happiness so desirable, as to be well worth the best care and endeavour of a man's whole life.

Let us then have a conscientious regard to the whole compass of our duty; and, with St Paul, *let us exercise ourselves to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men*: and let us never do any thing whereby we shall offer violence to the light of our minds. God hath given us this principle to be our constant guide and companion; and whoever, after due care to inform himself aright, does sincerely follow the dictate and direction of this guide, shall never fatally miscarry: but whoever goes against the clear dictate and conviction of his conscience, in so doing he undermines the foundation of his own comfort and peace, and sins against God and his own soul.

And, to the end we may keep our consciences clear of guilt, we should frequently examine ourselves, and look back upon the actions of our lives, and call ourselves to a strict account for them; that whereinssoever we have failed of innocency, we may make it up by repentance, and may get our consciences cleared of guilt by pardon and forgiveness: and if we do not do this, we cannot with confidence rely upon the testimony of our consciences; because many great sins may slip out of our memories without a particular repentance for them, which yet do require and stand in need of a particular repentance.

Especially we should search our consciences more narrowly at these more solemn times of repentance, and when we are preparing ourselves to receive the holy sacrament. And if at these times our hearts do accuse and condemn us for any thing, we should not only heartily lament and bewail it before God, but sincerely resolve, by God's grace, to reform in that particular, and from that time to break off that sin which we have then repented of, and have asked forgiveness of God for: for if, after we have repented of it, we return to it again, we wound our consciences afresh, and involve them in a new guilt.

In the last place, we should reverence our consciences,
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and stand in awe of them, and have a great regard to their testimony and verdict: for conscience is a domestic judge, and a kind of familiar god; and therefore, next to the Supreme Majesty of heaven and earth, every man should be afraid to offend his own reason and conscience, which, whenever we knowingly do amiss, will beat us with many stripes, and handle us more severely than the greatest enemy we have in the world. So that, next to the dreadful sentence of the great day, every man hath reason to dread the sentence of his own conscience. *God indeed is greater than our hearts, and knows all things*; but under him we have the greatest reason to fear the judgement of our own consciences: for nothing but that can give us comfort, and nothing can create so much trouble and disquiet to us.

And though the judgement of our consciences be not always the judgement of God, yet we have great reason to have great regard to it; and that upon several accounts; which I shall but briefly mention, and so conclude.

1. Because the judgement of our conscience is free from any compulsion. No body can force it from us, whether we will or no, and make us to pass sentence against ourselves, whether we see reason for it or not.

2. The sentence of our own conscience is very likely to be impartial, at least not too hard on the severe side; because men naturally love themselves, and are too apt to be favourable in their own case. All the world cannot bribe a man against himself. There is no man whose mind is not either distempered by melancholy, or deluded by false principles, that is apt to be credulous against himself, and his own interest and peace.

3. The judgement which our conscience passeth upon our own actions, is upon the most intimate and certain knowledge of them, and of their true motives and ends. We may easily be deceived in our judgement of the actions of other men, and may think them to be much better or worse than in truth they are; because we cannot certainly tell with what mind they were done, and what circumstances there may be to excuse or aggravate them; how strong the temptation was, or how weak the judgement of him that was seduced by it into error and folly.

But we are conscious to all the secret springs, and motives,

tives, and circumstances, of our own actions : we can descend into our own hearts, and dive to the bottom of them, and search into the most retired corners of our intentions and ends ; which none, besides ourselves, but only God, can do ; for, excepting him only, *none knows the things of a man, but the spirit of a man which is in him.*

4. The sentence of our conscience is peremptory and inexorable, and there is no way to avoid it. Thou mayst possibly fly from the wrath of other men to the uttermost parts of the earth ; but thou canst not stir one step from thyself : in vain shalt thou call upon the mountains and rocks to fall on thee, and hide thee from the sight of thine own conscience.

Wretched and miserable man ! when thou hast offended and wounded thy conscience : for whither canst thou go, to escape the eye of this witness, the terror of this judge, the torment of this executioner ? A man may as soon get rid of himself, and quit his own being, as fly from the sharp accusations and stinging guilt of his own conscience ; which will perpetually haunt him, till it be done away by repentance and forgiveness.

We account it a fearful thing to be haunted by evil spirits ; and yet the spirit of a man which is in him, thoroughly affrighted with its own guilt, may be a more ghastly and amazing spectacle than all the devils in hell. There is no such frightful apparition in the world as a man's own guilty and terrified conscience staring him in the face : *A spirit that is thus wounded, who can bear ?*

To conclude : Let those considerations prevail with us always to live, not with regard to the opinion of others, which may be grounded upon mistake, or may not indeed be their opinion, but their flattery ; but with regard to the judgement of our own conscience, which, though it may sometimes be mistaken, can never be bribed and corrupted. We may be hypocrites to others, and base flatterers ; but our own consciences, whenever they are thoroughly awakened, are always sincere, and deal truly with us, and speak to us as they think.

Therefore, whatever we say or do, let it be sincere : for though hypocrisy may for a while preserve our esteem and reputation with others, yet it can signify nothing to the peace of our minds : and then what will it avail us
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to conceal any thing from other men, when we can hide nothing that we say or do from our own consciences?

The sum of all is this: If we would keep a conscience void of offence, let us always be calm and considerate, and have the patience to examine things thoroughly and impartially: let us be humble, and willing to learn, and never too proud and stiff to be better informed: let us do what we can to free ourselves from prejudice and passion, from self-conceit and self-interest; which are often too strong a bias upon the judgements of the best men, as we may see every day in very sad and melancholy instances: and, having taken all due care to inform our consciences aright, let us follow the judgement of our minds in what we do; and then we have done what we can to please God.

And if we would always take this care to keep a good conscience, we should always be easy, and good company to ourselves. But if we offend our consciences, by doing contrary to the clear dictate and conviction of them, we make the unhappiest breach in the world; we stir up a quarrel in our own breasts, and arm our own minds against ourselves; we create an enemy to ourselves in our own bosoms, and fall out with the best and most inseparable companion of our lives.

And, on the contrary, *a good conscience will be a continual feast*, and will give us that comfort and courage in an evil day which nothing else can; and then, whatever happen to us, we may *commit our souls to God in well-doing, as into the hands of a faithful creator*. To whom, with our blessed Saviour and Redeemer, and the Holy Ghost the Comforter, be all honour and glory, now and ever. *Amen.*

S E R M O N XXXIX.

How to keep a truly religious fast.

Preached before the Queen, at Whitehall, Sept. 16. 1691.

Z E C H. vii. 5.

Speak unto all the people of the land, and to the priests, saying, When ye fasted and mourned in the fifth and seventh month, even those seventy years, DID YE AT ALL FAST UNTO ME, EVEN TO ME?

IN the beginning of this chapter, the people of the Jews, who were then rebuilding the temple at Jerusalem, and had already far advanced the work, though it was not perfectly finished till about two years after, send to the Priests and the Prophets, to inquire of them, whether they should still continue the fast of the fifth month, which they had begun in Babylon, and continued to observe during the seventy years of their captivity, in a sad remembrance of the destruction of the city and temple of Jerusalem? or should not now rather turn it into a day of feasting and gladness?

To this inquiry God, by his Prophet, returns an answer in this and the following chapter. And first he expostulates with them concerning those their monthly fasts, whether they did indeed deserve that name, and were not rather a mere shew and pretence of a religious fast, ver. 4. 5. *Then came the word of the Lord of hosts unto me, saying, Speak unto all the people of the land, and to the priests, saying, When ye fasted and mourned in the fifth and seventh month, even those seventy years, did ye at all fast unto me, even to me?* The inquiry was particularly concerning the fast of the fifth month, because the occasion of that was more considerable than of all the other; but the answer of God mentions the fasts of the fifth and seventh

venth months, these two being probably observed with greater solemnity than the other.

But for our clearer understanding of this, it will be requisite to consider the original and occasion of all their monthly fasts; which, as appears from other places of scripture, in short, was this. When the Jews were carried away captive into Babylon, in a deep sense of this great judgement of God upon them for their sins, and of the heavy affliction which they lay under, they appointed four annual fasts, which they observed during their seventy years captivity, *viz.* the fast of the fourth month, in remembrance of the enemies breaking through the wall of Jerusalem, which we find mentioned, Jer. lii. 6. 7. the fast of the fifth month, in memory of the destruction of the city and temple of Jerusalem, ver. 12. 13.; the fast of the seventh month, in remembrance of the slaying of Gedaliah, upon which followed the dispersion of the Jews, of which we have an account, Jer. xlii. 1. 2. and the fast of the tenth month, in memory of the beginning of the siege of Jerusalem, of which we find mention, 2 Kings xxv. 1.

In this order we find these four annual fasts mentioned, Zech. viii. 19. not according to the order of the events, but of the months of the several years in which these events happened: and there likewise God gives a full answer to this inquiry concerning the continuance of these annual fasts, namely, that they should for the future be turned into solemn days of joy and gladness, Zech. viii. 18. 19. *And the word of the Lord of hosts came unto me, saying, Thus saith the Lord of hosts, The fast of the fourth month, and the fast of the fifth, and the fast of the seventh, and the fast of the tenth, shall be to the house of Judah joy and gladness, and chearful feasts.*

I return now to the text, *Did ye at all fast unto me, even unto me?* that is, Did these fasts truly serve to any religious end and purpose? did not the people content themselves with a mere external shew and performance, without any inward affliction and humiliation of their souls, in order to a real repentance? did they not still go on in their sins; nay, and add to them upon these occasions, fasting for strife, and debate, and oppression? in a word, were they not worse rather than better for them? And

therefore God had no regard to them; as it follows in this chapter, ver. 9. 10. 11. 12. 13. *Thus speaketh the Lord of hosts, saying, Execute true judgement, and shew mercy and compassions every man to his brother; and oppress not the widow nor the fatherless, the stranger nor the poor; and let none of you imagine mischief against his brother in your heart. But they refused to hearken, and pulled away the shoulder, and stopped their ears, that they should not hear; yea, they made their heart as an adamant-stone, lest they should hear the law, and the words which the Lord of hosts hath sent in his Spirit by the former prophets: therefore came a great wrath from the Lord of hosts. Therefore it is come to pass, that as he cried, and they would not hear; so they cried, and I would not hear, saith the Lord of hosts.*

So that, notwithstanding these outward solemnities of fasting and prayer, here was nothing of a religious fast: *Did ye at all fast unto me, even to me?* They were sensible of the judgements of God which were broken in upon them, but they did not turn from their sins, but persisted still in their obstinacy and disobedience.

And what God here, by the Prophet Zachary, calls *fasting unto him, even to him*, the prophet Isaiah calls *the fast which God hath chosen, and an acceptable day to the Lord*. *Wherefore have we fasted, say they, and thou seest not? wherefore have we afflicted our souls, and thou takest no knowledge? Behold, ye fast for strife and debate, and to smite with the fist of wickedness: ye shall not fast as ye do this day, to make your voice to be heard on high. Is it such a fast as I have chosen? a day for a man to afflict his soul? is it to bow down his head as a bulrush, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? wilt thou call this a fast and an acceptable day to the Lord? Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out, to thy house? when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him, and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh? Then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thy salvation shall spring forth speedily: then shalt thou call, and the Lord shall answer, &c.*

From all which passages we may easily understand wherein these monthly fasts of the Jews were defective, and what was the fault that God finds with them, when
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he expostulates so severely in the text: *When ye fasted and mourned in the fifth and seventh month, even those seventy years, did ye at all fast unto me, even to me?* In the general, the fault which God finds with them was this, that these solemnities did not serve any real end and purpose of religion, but failed in their main design; which was a sincere repentance, and reformation of their lives: for which reason he tells them, that they were not at all acceptable to him, nor esteemed by him as performed unto him, because they did not answer the true intention and design of them.

My work at this time shall be, 1. to consider in general what it is to *fast unto God*; that is, to keep a truly religious fast. 2. To bring the matter nearer to ourselves, I shall consider more particularly, what the duty of this day, appointed by their Majesties for a solemn humiliation and repentance throughout the nation, does require at our hands.

I. I shall consider in general what it is to *fast unto God*; that is, to keep a truly religious fast. And of this I shall give an account in the following particulars. 1. A truly religious fast consists in the afflicting of our bodies by a strict abstinence, that so they may be fit and proper instruments to promote and help forward the grief and trouble of our minds. 2. In the humble confession of our sins to God, with shame and confusion of face, and with a hearty contrition and sorrow for them. 3. In an earnest deprecation of God's displeasure, and humble supplications to him, that he would avert his judgements, and turn away his anger from us. 4. In intercession with God for such spiritual and temporal blessings upon ourselves, and others, as are needful and convenient. 5. In alms and charity to the poor, that our humiliation and prayers may find acceptance with God. I do but mention these particulars, that I may more largely insist upon that which I mainly intended, and proposed to consider in the next place, namely,

II. What the duty of this day, appointed by their Majesties for a solemn humiliation and repentance throughout the nation, doth require at our hands. And this I shall endeavour to comprise in the following particulars. 1. That we should humble ourselves before God, every

one for his own personal sins, whereby he hath provoked God, and increased the public guilt, and done his part to bring down the judgements and vengeance of God upon the nation. 2. That we should likewise heartily lament and bewail the sins of others; especially the great and crying sins of the nation, committed by all ranks and orders of men amongst us, and whereby the wrath and indignation of Almighty God hath been so justly incensed against us. 3. We should most importunately deprecate those terrible judgements of God to which these our great and crying sins have so justly exposed us. 4. We should pour out our earnest prayers and supplications to Almighty God for the preservation of their Majesties sacred persons, and for the establishment and prosperity of their government, and for the good success of their arms and forces by sea and land. 5. Our fasting and prayers should be accompanied with our charity and alms to the poor and needy. 6. Lastly, We should prosecute our repentance and good resolutions to the actual reformation and amendment of our lives. Of these I shall, by God's assistance, speak as briefly and as plainly as I can, and so as every one of us may understand what God requires of him upon so solemn an occasion as this.

1. We should humble ourselves before God, every one for his own personal sins and miscarriages, whereby he hath provoked God, and increased the public guilt, and done his part to bring down the judgements and vengeance of God upon the nation. Our humiliation and repentance should begin with ourselves and our own sins; because repentance is always designed to end in reformation: but there cannot be a general reformation without the reformation of particular persons, which do constitute and make up the generality.

And this Solomon prescribes as the true method of a national reformation, and the proper effect of a public humiliation and repentance, in that admirable prayer of his at the dedication of the temple, 1 Kings viii. 37. 38. 39. 40. *If there be (says he) in the land famine; if there be pestilence, blasting, mildew, locust, or if there be caterpillar; if their enemy besiege them in the land of their cities; whatever plague, whatever sickness there be:*
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what prayer and supplications soever be made by any man, or by all thy people Israel, WHO SHALL KNOW EVERY MAN THE PLAGUE OF HIS OWN HEART, and spread forth his hands towards this house: then hear thou in heaven thy dwelling-place, and forgive, and do, and give to every man according to his ways, whose heart thou knowest; (for thou, even thou only knowest the hearts of all the children of men) that they may fear thee all the days which they live in the land which thou gavest unto our fathers.

You see here, that in case of any public judgement or calamity, the humiliation and repentance of a nation must begin with particular persons: *What prayer or supplication soever be made by any man, or by all thy people Israel, WHO SHALL KNOW EVERY MAN THE PLAGUE OF HIS OWN HEART: then hear thou in heaven thy dwelling-place, and forgive.* Particular persons must be convinced of their personal sins and transgressions, before God will hear the prayers and forgive the sins of a nation.

And because we cannot perform this part of confessing and bewailing our own personal sins, and of testifying our particular repentance for them, in the public congregation, any otherwise than by joining with them in a general humiliation and repentance; therefore we should do well, on the day before the public fast, or at least the morning before we go to the public assembly, to humble ourselves before God in our families, and especially in our closets; confessing to him, with great shame and sorrow, all the particular sins and offences, together with the several aggravations of them, which we have been guilty of against the divine majesty, so far as we are able to call them particularly to our remembrance; and earnestly to beg of God the pardon and forgiveness of them, for his mercies sake in Jesus Christ.

And so likewise, after we return from the church, we should retire again into our closets, and there renew our repentance, with most serious and sincere resolutions of reforming in all those particulars which we have confessed and repented of. And if we would have our resolutions to come to any good, we must make them as distinct and particular as we can; and charge it upon
ourselves,

ourselves, as to such and such sins, for which we have declared our sorrow and repentance, that we will amend and do better for the future.

And we should endeavour also to fortify these good resolutions, in the best manner we can, by serious consideration, and by solemn promises of better obedience, and of a more conscientious care of our lives and all our actions for the future : and then, with the greatest earnestness and importunity, we should implore the assistance of God's grace and Holy Spirit to this purpose.

By this means the great end of a solemn fast and humiliation will be in some good measure attained, and not wholly defeated, as for the most part it is, by being huddled up and lost in a confused and general repentance ; which commonly ends together with the public assembly, without any real and permanent effect upon particular persons. Perhaps a great part of the congregation may have been in some degree sorry for their sins ; but after all, no man forsakes them, nor is the better for his sorrow, but leaves that behind in the church, and carries home with him the same affection for his sins which he had before, and a secret resolution not to leave them.

Thus it was with the people of the Jews. They had their solemn monthly fast, in which they made a great shew of humiliation, *hanging down their heads like a bulrush for a day, and spreading sackcloth and ashes under them* : but there was no inward change of their minds, no real reformation of their lives ; and as soon as ever the public solemnity was over, they turned every one to his former evil course. So God complains of them, Jer. viii. 6. *I hearkened (says he) and heard ; but they spake not aright : no man repented him of his wickedness, saying, What have I done ? but they turned every one to his course, as the horse rusheth into the battle. They spake not aright ; that is, they did not take the right method for an effectual repentance. They humbled themselves indeed before God, and repented at random for the sins of the nation in general, which they were all of them ready enough to acknowledge, and to lay a heavy load of guilt upon the community : but all this while, they never reflected upon themselves in particular ;*

cular ; they had no sense, no conviction of their own personal faults and miscarriages, without which there can be no true general repentance : *No man repented of his wickedness, saying, What have I done ?*

And as they had no sense of their own particular sins which they had been guilty of ; so they had no thought of leaving them : but as soon as ever the public fasting and humiliation was over, they turned to them again with the same eager and furious appetite : *They turned every one to his course, as the horse rusheth into the battle ;* that is, without any consideration, or sense of danger.

2. We should likewise, upon this day, heartily lament and bewail the sins of others ; especially the great and crying sins of the nation, committed by all ranks and orders of men amongst us, and whereby the wrath and indignation of Almighty God hath been so justly incensed against us.

This hath been the temper and practice of good men in all ages, to be greatly troubled and afflicted for the sins of others, as well as for their own ; to mourn for them in secret, as the Prophet Jeremy does for the obstinacy and impenitency of the Jews, and for the terrible judgements and calamities which their sins were ready to bring down upon them, Jer. xiii. 17. *But if ye will not return, (says he to that obdurate people), my soul shall weep in secret places for your pride, or obstinacy ; and mine eye shall weep sore, and run down with tears, because the Lord's flock is carried away captive.* And indeed almost the whole prophecy of Jeremy, and his book of Lamentations, are little else but a perpetual humiliation and mourning for the sins of that people, and for the judgements of God which he saw already inflicted, or foresaw to be coming upon them.

We read likewise of Lot, when he dwelt in Sodom, how he was vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked : *For that righteous man (saith St Peter) dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing, vexed his righteous soul from day to day, with their unlawful deeds.*

Holy David also, upon all occasions, testifies his great trouble and grief for the sins which he saw committed by others ; and was so affected with them, that he trembled at the very thought of them : Psal. cxix. 136. *Ri-*
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vers of tears (says he) run down mine eyes ; because men keep not thy law. And, in the same Psalm, ver. 53. Horror hath taken hold of me, because of the wicked that forsake thy law. And again, ver. 158. I beheld the transgressors, and was grieved ; because they kept not thy word.

And how does Daniel humble himself before God, and mourn, and in the name of all the people, and of all degrees and orders of men among them, take shame to himself and them, for the great sins which they had been guilty of ? Dan. ix. 5. 7. 8. *We have sinned, and have committed iniquity, and have done wickedly. O Lord, righteousness belongeth unto thee ; but unto us confusion of face, as at this day ; to our kings, to our princes, and to our fathers, because we have sinned against thee.*

With what trouble and confusion does Ezra, upon a solemn day of fasting and humiliation, acknowledge and bewail the sins of the people ? Ezra ix. 6. 7. *O my God, (says he), I am ashamed and blush to lift up my face to thee my God : for our iniquities are increased over our head, and our trespass is grown up unto the heavens. Since the days of our fathers, have we been in a great trespass unto this day ; and for our iniquities have we, our kings and our priests, been delivered into the hand of the kings of the lands, &c.*

And thus also ought we, the people of this sinful land, upon this solemn day of fasting and humiliation, to set our sins in order before us, with all their heinous aggravations ; and, in the bitterness of our souls, to lament and bewail that general prevalence of impiety and vice which hath overspread the nation, and diffused itself through all ranks and degrees of men, magistrates, ministers, and people. I shall speak something more particularly concerning each of these.

1st, The sins of the magistrates, and those that are in authority. They that make laws for others, and are to see to the execution of them, ought to be strict observers of them themselves. For it must needs put a man not a little out of countenance, to be severe upon those faults in others of which he knows himself to be notoriously guilty. And yet how many are there, whose place and duty it is to correct the vices and immoralities of others, who are far from being examples of virtue themselves ?

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And therefore it is no wonder that there is so lame and unequal a distribution of justice in the nation ; and that magistrates are so cold and slack in the discountenancing of vice and impiety, and in putting the good and wholesome laws made against them in execution ; as against the profanation of the Lord's day, by secular business, by vain sports and pastimes, which by the very nature of them are apt to dissolve the minds of men into mirth and pleasure, and to carry them off from all serious thoughts of God and religion, and from the meditations of another world ; and to give the devil an advantage, and an opportunity, which he never fails to take, to steal the *good seed*, the word of God, which they have heard that day, out of their hearts, and to make it of none effect ; and, which is yet worse, by lewd and sinful practices, which are unlawful at any time, but upon that day are a double breach and violation of God's law.

And likewise by neglecting to put in execution the laws against profane swearing and cursing, for which the land mourns ; and against drunkenness, and adultery, and fornication, which are so common, and so impudently committed amongst us ; whether they be civil or ecclesiastical laws : and it is hard to say which of them are most remissly executed.

And to mention no more, by neglecting to prosecute that horrible sin of murder, so frequently now committed in our streets beyond the example of former ages, with that severity and impartiality which is necessary to free the nation from the guilt of that crying sin, which calls so loud to heaven for vengeance.

And all this, notwithstanding the magistrates are under the oath of God to put the laws in due execution against all these crimes, so far as they come to their knowledge, and fall under their cognisance.

2dly, The sins of the ministers, who serve at God's altar, and watch over the souls of men ; whose blood will be required at their hands, if any of them perish through their fault and neglect. There is no reason to doubt, but that there are a good number of faithful shepherds in the land, who watch over their flocks with great care and conscience, remembering the dreadful account which they must one day make to *him who shall judge*

judge the quick and dead, of the souls committed to their charge.

But yet how grossly do many of us fail of the faithful discharge of the substantial parts of this high office? wanting a just sense of the inestimable worth and value of the souls of men, for whom Christ died; taking little or no care to instruct them in the good knowledge of the Lord, and to lead them in the way to eternal happiness by an exemplary conversation.

Nay too many among us demean themselves so scandalously, as perfectly to undermine the credit and effect of their doctrine, by leading lives so directly contrary to it; and to alienate their people from the church, and to make them to abhor the sacrifice and service of the Lord, by their wicked and unhallowed conversations; hereby exposing them to the craft of seducers, and rendering them an easy prey to the emissaries of the church of Rome, or to any other sect and faction that pretends a greater zeal for religion, or makes a better shew of a strict and unblameable life.

For who will regard or believe those teachers, who give all the evidence that can be by their lives and actions, that they do not believe themselves and their own doctrines? When all is said, the life and manners of the preacher are the best eloquence, and have that dint and power of persuasion in them, which no words, no art can equal. Whoso lives as he speaks, does as it is said of our blessed Saviour, *speaks as one that hath authority, and not as the scribes: not as the scribes*; whose words, notwithstanding all the formality and gravity with which they were delivered, did therefore want weight and force, because, as our Saviour tells us of them, *they said, but did not*. Their lives were not answerable to their doctrines: whereas our blessed Saviour therefore *spoke as never man spake*, because he lived as never man lived, so innocent, so useful, so exemplary a life. He *was holy, harmless, and undefiled*; he *did no sin, neither was guile found in his lips*; he *fulfilled all righteousness, and went about doing good*. This was that which made him so powerful a preacher of righteousness; and we must necessarily fall so much short of him in the authority and efficacy of our sermons, as we

we do in the holiness and goodness of our lives. Such a preacher, and such a practice, as that of our blessed Saviour was, is every way fitted to reprove, and persuade, and reform mankind.

We now live in an age and church, wherein they who are called to be the teachers and guides of souls ought to take great heed, both to their doctrine and their lives, that the name of God may not be blasphemed, and his holy religion brought into contempt, by those who, above all others, are most nearly concerned to preserve and support the credit and honour of it.

And we cannot but see how our religion and church are beset and endangered on every side, by the rude assaults of infidelity, and by the cunning arts of seducing spirits, and by our own intestine heats and divisions; and it can never be sufficiently lamented, no though it were with tears of blood, that we whose particular charge and employment it is to build up the souls of men in a holy faith, and in the resolution of a good life, should, for want of due instruction, and by the dissolute and profligate lives of too many among us, and by inflaming our needless difference about lesser things, have so great a hand in pulling down religion, and in betraying the souls of men, either to downright infidelity, or to a careless neglect and profane contempt of all religion.

May not God justly expostulate this matter with us, as he did of old with the people of the Jews? Jer. v. 30. 31. *A wonderful and horrible thing is committed in the land. The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means, and my people love to have it so: and what will ye do in the end thereof?* When they who are the pastors and guides of souls, have, by their ill conduct and management, brought matters to that pass, that the generality of the people sit down contented with the worst state of things, and are become almost indifferent whether they have any religion or not, what can the end of these things be, but that *the kingdom of God will be taken from us, and given to a nation that will bring forth the fruits of it?*

If ever there be a public reformation among us, it must begin at the house of God; and they who are the

ministers of religion must lead on this work, and be more careful and conscientious in the discharge of that high and holy office which is committed to them by *the great shepherd and bishop of souls* : else what shall we say when God shall challenge us, as he once did the pastors of the Jewish church, by his Prophet, saying, Jer. xiii. 20. 21. *Where is the flock that was given thee, thy beautiful flock? What wilt thou say when he shall punish thee?*

3dly, The sins of the people; amongst whom there is almost an universal corruption and depravation of manners : infomuch that impiety and vice seem to have overspread the face of the nation; so that we may take up that sad complaint of the Prophet concerning the people of Israel, and apply it to ourselves, that *we are a sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evil doers; that the whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint; and that from the sole of the foot even to the head, there is no soundness in us, but wounds, and bruises, and putrifying sores*, Is. i. 4. 5.

We may justly stand amazed to consider how the God of all patience is provoked by us every day; to think how long he hath borne with us and *suffered our manners*; our open profaneness and infidelity; our great immoralities, and gross hypocrisy; our insolent contempt of religion, and our ill-favoured counterfeiting of it for low and sordid ends : and, which is the most melancholy consideration of all the rest, we seem to be degenerated to that degree, that it is very much to be feared, there is hardly integrity enough left amongst us to save us.

And then, if we consider further our most uncharitable and unchristian divisions, to the endangering both of our reformed religion, and of the civil rights and liberties of the nation; our incorrigibleness under the judgements of God which we have seen abroad in the earth, and which have in a very severe and terrible manner been inflicted upon these kingdoms, that the *inhabitants thereof might learn righteousness*; our insensibleness of the hand of God, so visible in his late providences towards us, and in the many merciful and wonderful deliverances which from time to time he hath wrought for us.

And, lastly, if we reflect upon our horrible ingratitude

tude to God our saviour and mighty deliverer, and to them likewise whom he hath so signally honoured in making them the happy means and instruments of our deliverance; and this not only expressed by a bold contempt of their authority, but by a most unnatural conspiracy against them with the greatest enemies, not only to the peace of the nation, but likewise to the reformed religion therein professed and by law established, and to the interest of it all the world over.

So that we may say with Ezra, chap. ix. 10. *And now, O our God, what shall we say unto thee after this? And may not God likewise say to us, as he did more than once to the Jews, Shall I not visit for these things? saith the Lord; and shall not my soul be avenged on such a nation as this?*

3. We should likewise upon this day earnestly deprecate God's displeasure, and make our humble supplications to him, that he would be graciously pleased to avert those terrible judgements which hang over us, and which we have just cause to fear may fall upon us; and that he would be intreated by us at last to be appeased towards us, and to turn from the fierceness of his anger.

This we find the people of God were wont to do upon their solemn days of fasting and prayer: and this God expressly enjoins, Joel ii. 15. 16. 17. *Blow the trumpet in Zion, sanctify a fast, call a solemn assembly; gather the people; sanctify the congregation; assemble the elders, &c. Let the priests, the ministers of the Lord, weep between the porch and the altar, and let them say, Spare thy people, O Lord, and give not thine heritage to reproach; that the heathen should rule over them: wherefore should they say among the people, Where is their God?*

And to this earnest deprecation of his judgements God promisseth a gracious answer; for so it immediately follows, ver. 18. *Then will the Lord be jealous for his land, and pity his people.*

And thus likewise Daniel, when he set his face to seek the Lord God by prayer and supplications, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes, Dan. ix. 3. does in a most humble and earnest manner deprecate the displeasure of God towards his people, and beg of him to remove his judgements, and to turn away his anger from them, ver. 16.

17. 18. 19. *O Lord, according to all thy righteousness, I beseech thee, let thine anger and thy fury be turned away from thy city Jerusalem, thy holy mountain : because for our sins, and for the iniquity of our fathers, Jerusalem and thy people are become a reproach to all that are about us. Now therefore, O our God, hear the prayer of thy servant, and his supplications ; and cause thy face to shine upon thy sanctuary which is desolate, for the Lord's sake. O my God, incline thine ear, and hear ; open thine eyes, and behold our desolations, and the city which is called by thy name : for we do not present our supplications before thee for our righteousness, but for thy great mercies. O Lord, hear, O Lord, forgive, O Lord, hearken and do ; defer not, for thine own sake, O my God : for thy city and thy people are called by thy name.*

And thus also should we, upon this solemn occasion, cry mightily unto God, and with the greatest importunity deprecate those terrible judgements which we so righteously have deserved, and to which the great and crying sins of the whole nation have so justly exposed us ; humbly beseeching him, not for our righteousness, but for his great mercy ; for his own name's sake, and because we are his people, and are called by his name, and because his holy truth and religion are professed amongst us ; that he would be pleased to hear the prayers of his servants, and their supplications which they have made before him this day, *for the Lord's sake.*

4. We should likewise, upon this day, pour out our most earnest supplications to Almighty God, for the preservation of their majesties sacred persons, and for the prosperity and establishment of their government, and for the good success of their arms and forces by sea and land.

And more especially, since his majesty, with so many confederate princes and states of Europe, is engaged in so necessary an undertaking for the common good of Christendom, and for the mutual preservation and recovery of their respective rights ; we should earnestly implore the favour and assistance of Almighty God in so just and glorious a cause, against the common invader and oppressor of the rights and liberties of mankind.

And that of his infinite goodness he would be graciously

ously pleased to take the person of our Sovereign Lord the King into the particular care and protection of his providence ; that he would secure his precious life from all secret attempts, and from open violence ; that he would give his angels charge over him, and cover his head in the day of battle, and crown it with victory over his enemies, and restore him to us again in safety.

And that he would likewise preserve and direct the Queen's Majesty, in whose hands the administration of the government is at present so happily placed ; that he would give her wisdom and resolution for such a time as this, and support and carry her through all the difficulties of it.

And, lastly, that he would bless them both with a long life, and a peaceful and happy reign over us ; that *under them we may live quiet and peaceable lives in all godliness and honesty.*

5. Our fasting and humiliation should be accompanied with our alms and charity to the poor and needy : and we should every one of us, according to the counsel given by the Prophet to King Nebuchadnezzar, Dan. iv. 27. *break off our sins by righteousness, and our iniquities by shewing mercy to the poor, if it may be a lengthening of our tranquillity :* hereby intimating, that if there be any way to prevent or remove the judgements of God, and to prolong the tranquillity and happiness of prince and people, a sincere repentance, and a great charity to them that are in necessity and distress, are most likely to prevail with God, not only to respite the ruin of a sinful people, but to incline him to thoughts of peace toward them : for so he promiseth to the Jews upon their sincere repentance, and earnest supplication to him, which are always accompanied with charity to the poor, Jer. xxix. 11. 12. 13. *For I know the thoughts which I think towards you, saith the Lord, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end. Then shall ye call upon me, and ye shall go and pray unto me, and I will hearken unto you : and ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart.*

And I have often thought, that the extraordinary charity of this whole nation, and of our pious princes, who are so ready to every good work, and such bright and

shining examples in this kind, more than once so seasonably extended to the relief of our distressed brethren, who fled hither for refuge from the rage and cruelty of their persecutors : I say, I have often thought, that this very thing, next to the infinite mercy and goodness of Almighty God, hath had a very particular influence upon our preservation and deliverance from those terrible calamities which were just ready to rush in upon us. And what cause have we to thank God, who hath allotted to us this more blessed and merciful part, to give and not to receive ; and to be free from persecution ourselves, that so we might be in a capacity to give refuge and relief to them that were persecuted ?

There are but few that have the faith to believe it, but certainly charity to the poor is a great security to us in times of evil. So David assures us, speaking of the righteous or charitable man, *He shall not (says he) be afraid in the evil time, and in the days of dearth he shall be satisfied.*

And so likewise in times of public distress, when we are beset with cruel and powerful enemies, who, if God were not on our side, would swallow us up, the public charity of a nation hath many times proved its best safeguard and shield : *It shall fight for thee (saith the son of Sirach, speaking of the charity of alms) against thine enemy, more than a mighty shield and strong spear.*

And of this, as I said before, I doubt not but we of this nation, by the great mercy and goodness of God to us, have had happy experience in our late wonderful deliverance under the conduct and valour of one of the best and bravest of princes ; to whom, by too many among us, the most unworthy and unthankful returns have been made for all the unwearied pains he hath undergone, and for the many desperate hazards to which he hath exposed himself for our sakes, that ever were made to so great and generous a benefactor : to so great a benefactor, I say, not only to these nations, but even to all Europe, in asserting and maintaining their liberties against the insolent pride and unjust incroachments of one of the greatest oppressors the world hath known for many ages. Of whom it may be said as Job doth of the leviathan, Job xli. 44. *Upon the earth there is not his like.* I am glad
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I cannot apply what immediately follows, that *he is made without fear*; but surely the next words are apposite enough, ver. 34. *He beholdeth all high things: and is king over all the children of pride. And yet he that is higher than the highest, even he that sitteth in the heavens, doth laugh at him; for he seeth that his day is coming.*

To conclude this particular; if we would have our prayers ascend up to heaven, and find acceptance there, our alms must go along with them. So the angel intimates, when he says to Cornelius, Acts x. 4. *Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God. Thy prayers and thine alms*; they must go together, if we desire that our prayers should be effectual. And the Prophet Isaiah, speaking of *the fast which God hath chosen*, and which is *acceptable* to him, makes charity and alms a most essential part of it, Is. lviii. 7. 9. *Is it not (says he) to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out, to thy house? when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him, and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh? Then shalt thou call, and the Lord shall answer; thou shalt cry, and he shall say, Here I am.*

6. and lastly, We should prosecute our repentance and good resolutions to the actual reformation and amendment of our lives; for in this repentance doth mainly consist. This is the proper fruit and effect of all our humiliation and good resolutions, to forsake our sins, and to become better for the future; more pious and devout towards God, more sober and chaste with regard to ourselves, more just and charitable, more humble and meek, towards all men: in a word, more innocent, more useful, and more *holy in all manner of conversation.*

And, without this, all our fasting and humiliation, our most earnest prayers and supplications, will signify nothing. All our sorrow and tears will be but as water spilt upon the ground, and will not turn to any account, either to save our own souls, or to preserve *this untoward generation, this crooked and perverse nation*, from ruin and destruction. So God tells Solomon, that this is the only way to appease and reconcile him to a sinful people, 2 Chron. vii. 14. *If my people which are called*
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by my name, shall humble themselves and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.

And if this were the happy effect of our prayers and humiliation this day, to *turn us from our wicked ways*, God would then turn away his anger from us; and, as he promised to the Jews by the Prophet Zachary, he would turn these our monthly fasts *into joy, and gladness, and chearfulness*, Zech. viii. 19. as he hath in a great measure already done, *Blessed be his great and glorious name.*

But if we will not hearken and obey, can we expect, that God should deliver us from the hands of our enemies, that we may sin against him without fear all the days of our lives? To what purpose should the providence of God take so much care to preserve our religion to us, when we make no better use of it for the direction and government of our lives? when it serves most of us only to talk of it; and too many amongst us to talk against it, to deride it, and despitefully to use it? Is this be the truth of our case, what can we say, why the kingdom of God should not be taken from us, and given to a nation that will bring forth the fruits of it? what can we say, why our candlestick should not be removed, and the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, which we have so long enjoyed, and so long rebelled against, should not be utterly extinguished amongst us?

And if I cannot prevail with you to come to these good resolutions, and to make them good; if you will not be persuaded to practise, yet be pleased to attend to what we say. Hear our words at least, if you will not do them. This the people of the Jews would do when they were at the worst. So God tells the prophet concerning them, Ezek. xxxiii. 31. *They come unto thee as the people cometh; and they sit before thee as my people, and they hear thy words, but they will not do them.*

I had much rather at any time have occasion to praise than to reprove, especially in this great assembly: and yet it is not to be dissembled, that the behaviour of too many in this place is frequently so careless and irreverent, as is very misbecoming those who are

in the more peculiar presence of the great and glorious majesty of heaven and earth, and profess at that very time to worship him.

I am sure we have a better pattern perpetually before us, of a decent and unaffected devotion, of a most serious and steady attention, without wandering, without diversion, and without drowsiness: such an example as I cannot but hope will in a short time gain upon us all, and by a more gentle and silent reproof win us to the imitation of it.

And if we could but be prevailed upon to demean ourselves with that reverence, and to hear with that attention, which becomes the worship and the word of God, it might then be hoped, that we would consider what is said; and consideration would probably work conviction, and conviction bring us to a better mind, and to a firm purpose of doing what we are inwardly convinced it is both our duty and our interest to do.

Let us then go away from this solemnity, with a resolution to do every one what we ought, truly and earnestly to repent us of our sins past, and to lead a new life for the future; to *fear that great and terrible God*, in whose presence we have humbled ourselves this day: and to *turn to him that hath smitten us*, lest we provoke him to *punish us yet seven times more*, and after that *seven times more for our sins*, and for our impenitency in them, till at last *he make our plagues wonderful*.

To conclude: Let us every one, with that true penitent in Job, take words to ourselves, and say, *Surely it is meet to be said unto God, I have borne chastisement, I will not offend any more: that which I see not, teach thou me; if I have done iniquity, I will do no more. Oh! that there were such a heart in us, that it might be well with us, and with our children for ever.*

Which God of his infinite goodness grant, for his mercies sake in Jesus Christ. To whom, with thee, O Father, and the Holy Ghost, be all honour and glory, both now and ever. *Amen.*

S E R.

S E R M O N XL.

That God is the only happiness of man.

Preached before the Queen, at Whitehall, Mar. 20. 169^o $\frac{1}{2}$.

P s A L. lxxiii. 25.

Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee.

THe design of this psalm is, to vindicate the goodness and justice of the divine providence, notwithstanding the prosperous state of the wicked, and the afflicted condition of good men many times in this world. And, in the first place, the Psalmist, whoever he was, whether David or Asaph, lays down this for a most certain truth, That God is good to good men: ver. 1. *Of a truth God is good to Israel, to such as are of a clean heart.*

And yet for all this he tells us, that at sometimes he was under no small temptation to question the truth of this principle, when he beheld the promiscuous dispensation of things here below, that the wicked are often prosperous, and good men exposed to great calamities in this life; as if God either neglected human affairs, or had a greater kindness for the workers of iniquity, than for pious and good men: ver. 2. 3. *As for me, my foot had well-nigh slipped: for I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.*

This, he says, was a very great stumbling-block to good men, and tempted them to doubt of the providence of God: *Therefore his people return hither; and waters of a full cup are wrung out to them. And they say, Doth God know? and is there knowledge in the Most High?* ver. 10. 11. This sentence is somewhat obscurely rendered in our translation, so as to make the sense of it difficult; which is plainly this: *Therefore his people return hither; that is, therefore good men come to this,*

this, in the greatness of their affliction, and in the bitterness of their soul, to question God's knowledge and care of human affairs.

Behold, (say they, ver. 12.) these are the ungodly, and yet they are the prosperous in the world, they increase in riches. To what purpose then is it for any man to be religious and virtuous? ver. 13. Verily, I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency. In vain have I endeavoured after purity of heart and innocency of life, since so little good comes of it: nay, so far from that, that I have been in continual trouble and affliction: ver. 14. All the day long have I been plagued, and chastened every morning.

Such thoughts as these often came into his mind, and gave him great trouble and disquiet: but he presently corrects himself: ver. 15. *If I say, I will speak thus; I should offend against the generation of thy children: that is, I should go against the sense of all pious and good men, who have always believed the providence of God, notwithstanding this objection: which at last he tells us he had raised on purpose to try if he could find the solution of it: ver. 16. I thought to know this, which was grievous in mine eyes: and then he resolves all into the unsearchable wisdom of the divine providence, which if we fully understood from first to last, we should see good reason to be satisfied with the equity of it: ver. 17. 18. When I go into the sanctuary of God, then shall I understand the end of these men; how thou didst set them in slippery places, &c.* This satisfied him, that whenever the secret design of God's providence should be unfolded, whether in this world or the other, how strange and cross forever things might seem to be at present, yet in the issue and conclusion it would appear, that neither are bad men so happy, nor good men so miserable, as at present they may seem to be.

So that, upon a full debate of this matter, the Psalmist concludes, that these objections against providence do spring from our ignorance, and short and imperfect view of things; whereas if we saw the whole design from beginning to end, it would appear to be very reasonable and regular: ver. 21. 22. *Thus my heart was grieved. So foolish was I, and ignorant; and as a beast before*

fore thee. And in regard to himself, he tells us, that he saw great reason to acknowledge God's tender care over him in particular, and that he could find no security or comfort for himself but in God alone : ver. 23. *Nevertheless, I am continually with thee : thou hast holden me by thy right hand. Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory :* As if he had said, I am sensible of thy constant presence with me, and care of me ; and do entirely depend upon thy guidance and direction, not doubting but that my present troubles and afflictions will have a happy and glorious issue. And, at last, he breaks out into a kind of exultation and triumph for the mighty consolation which he found in the firm belief of the being and providence of God, as the great stay and support of his soul in the worst condition that could befall him ; in the words of the text, *Whom have I in heaven but thee ? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee.* If a man were to chuse a happiness for himself, and were to ransack heaven and earth for it ; after all his search and inquiry, he would at last fix upon God as the chief happiness of man, and the true and only rest and centre of our souls. This then is the plain meaning of the text, that nothing in the world but God can make men happy : *Whom have I in heaven but thee ? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee.*

That man of himself is not sufficient for his own happiness, is evident upon many accounts ; because he is liable to so many evils and calamities, which he can neither prevent nor remedy. He is full of wants, which he cannot supply ; compassed about with infirmities, which he can only complain of, but is not able to redress : he is obnoxious to dangers, which he must always fear, because he can never sufficiently provide against them.

Consider man by himself, and from under the conduct and protection of a superior and more powerful being, and he is in a most disconsolate and forlorn condition : secure of nothing that he enjoys, and liable to be disappointed of every thing that he hopes for. He is apt to grieve for what he cannot help ; and perhaps the justest cause of his grief is, that he cannot help it : for if he could, instead of grieving for it, he would help it. He

He cannot refrain from desiring a great many things which he would fain have, but is never likely to obtain, because they are out of his power; and it troubles him both that they are so, and that he cannot help his being troubled at it.

Thus *man walketh in a vain shew, and disquieteth himself in vain*; courting happiness in a thousand shapes; and the faster he follows it, the swifter it flies from him. Almost every thing promiseth happiness to us at a distance, such a step of honour, such a pitch of estate, such a fortune or match for a child: but when we come nearer to it, either we fall short of it, or it falls short of our expectation; and it is hard to say which of these is the greatest disappointment. Our hopes are usually bigger than enjoyment can satisfy; and an evil long feared, besides that it may never come, is many times more painful and troublesome than the evil itself when it comes.

In a word, *man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upwards*. He comes into the world naked and unarmed, and from himself more destitute of the natural means of his security and support than any other creature whatsoever; as it were on purpose to shew, that he is more peculiarly the care of a superior providence. And as man, of all the creatures of this lower world, is only made to own and acknowledge a Deity; so God in great wisdom hath so ordered things, that none of the other creatures should have so much need of him, and so much reason to acknowledge their necessary dependence upon him. So that the words of David are the very sense and voice of nature, declaring to us, that mankind is born into the world upon terms of greater dependence upon the providence of God than other creatures, Psal. xxii. 9. 10. 11. *Thou art he* (says David there to God) *that tookest me out of the womb; thou madest me to hope, (or thou didst keep me in safety), when I was upon my mother's breasts. I was cast upon thee from the womb; thou art my God from my mother's belly. Be not far from me, for trouble is near.* Trouble is always near to us, and therefore it is happy for us that God is never far from any of us: *For in him we live, and move, and have our being.*

And when we are grown up, we are liable to a great

many mischiefs and dangers every moment of our lives ; and without the providence of God, continually infecure, not only of the good things of this life, but even of life itself : so that, when we come to be men, we cannot but wonder how ever we arrived at that state, and how we have continued in it so long, considering the infinite difficulties and dangers which have continually attended us ; that in running the gantlope of a long life, when so many hands have been lifted up against us, and so many strokes levelled at us, we have escaped so free, and with so few marks and scars upon us ; that when we are besieged with so many dangers, and so many arrows of death are perpetually flying about us, to which we do so many ways lie open, we should yet hold out twenty, forty, sixty years, and some of us perhaps longer, and do still stand at the mark untouched, at least not dangerously wounded by any of them : and considering likewise this fearful and wonderful frame of a human body, this infinitely complicated engine ; in which, to the due performance of the several functions and offices of life, so many strings and springs, so many receptacles and channels, are necessary, and all in their right frame and order ; and in which, besides the infinite, imperceptible, and secret ways of mortality, there are so many sluices and floodgates to let death in, and life out, that it is next to a miracle, though we take but little notice of it, that every one of us did not die every day since we were born : I say, considering the nice and curious frame of our bodies, and the innumerable contingencies and hazards of human life, which is set in so slippery a place, that we still continue in the land of the living, we cannot ascribe to any thing but the watchful providence of Almighty God, *who holds our soul in life, and suffers not our foot to be moved.*

To the same merciful providence of God we owe, that, whilst we continue in life, we have any comfortable possession and enjoyment of ourselves, and of that which makes us men : I mean our reason and understanding : that our imagination is not let loose upon us, to haunt and torment us with melancholic freaks and fears : that we are not delivered up to the horrors of a gloomy and guilty mind : that every day we do not fall into frenzy
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and distraction, which, next to wickedness and vice, is the forest calamity, and saddest disguise of human nature; I say, next to wickedness and vice which is a wilful frenzy, a madness, not from misfortune, but from choice: whereas the other proceeds from natural and necessary causes, such as are in a great measure out of our power; so that we are perpetually liable to it, from any secret and sudden disorder of the brain, from the violence of a disease, or the vehement transport of any passion.

Now, if things were under no government, what could hinder so many probable evils from breaking in upon us, and from treading upon the heels of one another; like the calamities of Job, when *the hedge which God had set about him and all that he had*, was broken down and removed?

So that if there were no God to take care of us, we could be secure of no sort, no degree of happiness, in this world; no not for one moment: and there would be no other world for us to be happy in, and to make amends to us for all the fears and dangers, all the troubles and calamities, of this present life: for God and another world stand and fall together. Without him there can be no life after this; and if our hopes of happiness were only in this life, man of all other beings in this lower world would certainly be the most miserable.

I cannot say, that all the evils which I have mentioned would happen to all, if the providence of God did not rule the world; but that every man would be in danger of them all, and have nothing to support and comfort him against the fear of that danger. For the nature of man, considered by itself, is plainly insufficient for its own happiness; so that we must necessarily look abroad, and seek for it somewhere else: and who can shew us that good that is equal to all the wants and necessities, all the capacities and desires, all the fears and hopes, of human nature? Whatsoever can answer all these, must have these following properties.

1. It must be an all-sufficient good.
2. It must be perfect goodness.
3. It must be firm and unchangeable in itself.

4. It must be such a good as none can deprive us of, and take away from us.

5. It must be eternal.

6. It must be able to support and comfort us in every condition, and under all the accidents and adversities of human life.

7. Lastly, It must be such a good as can give perfect rest and tranquillity to our minds.

Nothing that is short of all this can make us happy; and no creature, no not the whole creation, can pretend to be all this to us. All these properties meet only in God, who is the perfect and supreme good; as I shall endeavour in the following discourse more particularly to shew; and, consequently, that God is the only happiness of man.

I. God is an all-sufficient good. And this does import two things; wisdom to contrive our happiness, and power to effect it; for neither of these, without the other, is sufficient, and both these in the highest and most eminent degree are in God.

He is infinitely wise to design and contrive our happiness, because he knows what happiness is, and how to frame us so as to be capable of the happiness he designs for us; and how to order and dispose all other things so as that they shall be no hinderance and impediment to it.

He perfectly understands all the possibilities of things, and how to fit means to any end. He knows all our wants, and how to supply them; all our hopes and desires, and how to satisfy them: he foresees all the dangers and evils which threaten us, and knows how to prevent or divert them, if he thinks fit; or if he permit them to come, how to support us under them, or to deliver us out of them, or to turn them to our greater benefit and advantage in the last issue and result of things.

His wisdom cannot be surpris'd by any accident which he did not foresee, and which he is not sufficiently provided against. The wisdom of men is but short and imperfect, and liable to infinite errors and mistakes: in many cases men know not what is safest and best for them, nor whether this or that will conduce most to their happiness: nay, it often happens, that those very means which the wisest men chuse for their security, do prove the

the occasions of their ruin ; and they are thrown down by those very ways whereby they thought to raise and establish themselves.

Especially if God breathe upon the counsels of men, how are their designs blasted ? how are they infatuated and foiled in their deepest contrivances, and *snared in the work of their own hands* ? When it is of the Lord, the wisdom of the greatest politicians is turned into foolishness : *for there is no wisdom, nor understanding, nor counsel against the Lord.*

But the divine wisdom, being founded upon infinite knowledge, is thereby secured against all possibility of error and mistake. God perfectly knows the natures and the powers of all his creatures, and therefore can never be mistaken in the use and application of them to any of his purposes : so that none of his designs of love and mercy to the sons of men can miscarry for want of good contrivance, or wise conduct.

And as he is perfectly wise to contrive our happiness, so is he infinitely powerful to effect it, and to remove out of the way all the obstacles and impediments of it. We may understand many times what would conduce to our happiness, but may not be able to compass it ; but nothing is out of the reach of omnipotency : many things are difficult to us, but nothing is too hard for God : many things are impossible with us, but *with God all things are possible.* For he is the fountain and original of all power, from whom it is derived, and upon whom it depends, and to whom it is perfectly subject and subordinate : he can do all things at once, and in an instant, and with the greatest ease ; and no created power can put any difficulty in his way, much less make any effectual resistance ; because omnipotency can check, and countermand, and bear down before it, all other powers.

So that if God be on our side, who can be against us ? We may safely *commit our souls into his hands ; for he is able to keep that which is committed to him.* He can give us all good things, and deliver us from all evil ; for *his is the kingdom and the glorious power.* Though all creatures should fail us, we may rely upon God, and live upon his all-sufficiency for our supply ; and may say with the Prophet, *Though the fig-tree should not blossom,*

neither fruit be in the vine; though the labour of the olive should fail, and the fields should yield no meat; though the flock should be cut off from the fold, and there should be no herd in the stalls: yet would I rejoice in the Lord, and joy in the God of my salvation.

II. As God is an all-sufficient good, so he is perfect goodness. He is willing to communicate happiness to us, and to employ his power and wisdom for our good. He made us that he might make us happy; and nothing can hinder us from being so but ourselves. Such is his goodness, that *he would have all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth; and when we have provoked him by our sins, he is long-suffering to us ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance: for he delighteth not in the death of a sinner, but rather that he would turn from his wickedness, and live.* So that, if any of us be miserable, it is our own choice; if we perish, our destruction is of ourselves: for, as the wise man, in one of the apocryphal books, says excellently, *God made not death: neither hath he pleasure in the destruction of the living. But men seek death in the error of their life; and pull destruction upon themselves, with the works of their own hands.*

So great is the goodness of God to mankind, that he hath omitted nothing that is necessary to our happiness. He designed it for us at first; and to that end he hath endued us with powers and faculties, whereby we are capable of knowing, and loving, and obeying, and enjoying him the chief good. And when we had forfeited all this by the wilful transgression and disobedience of the first parents of mankind, and were miserably bruised and maimed by their fall, God of his infinite mercy was pleased to restore us to a new capacity of happiness, by sending his only Son to suffer in our nature, and in our stead; and thereby to become a propitiation for the sins of the whole world, and the author of eternal salvation to them that believe and obey him; and he hath likewise promised to give us his Holy Spirit, to enable us to that faith and obedience which the gospel requires of us as the necessary conditions of our eternal salvation.

III. God is also a firm and unchangeable good. Notwithstanding his infinite wisdom, and power, and goodness,

ness, we might be miserable, if God were mutable. For that cannot be a happiness which depends upon uncertainties; and perhaps one of the greatest aggravations of misery is, to fall from happiness; to have been once happy, and afterwards to cease to be so: and that would unavoidably happen to us, if the cause of our happiness could change, and the foundation of it be removed. If God could be otherwise than powerful, and wise, and good, all our hopes of happiness would be shaken, and would fall to the ground. But the divine nature is not subject to any change: as he is *the father of lights*, and *the author of every good and perfect gift*; so *with him is no variableness, neither shadow of turning*. All the things of this world are mutable; and for that reason, had they no other imperfection belonging to them, cannot make us happy.

IV. God is such a good as none can deprive us of, and take away from us. If the things of this world were unchangeable in their nature, and not liable to any decay, yet they cannot make us happy, because we may be cheated of them by fraud, or robbed of them by violence. But God cannot be taken from us. Nothing but our sins can part God and us: *Who shall separate us* (saith the Apostle, Rom. viii. 35.) *from the love of God? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?* We may be stript of all our worldly comforts and enjoyments, by the violence of men: but none of all these can separate us from God: *I am persuaded*, (as the Apostle goes on with great triumph, ver. 38. 39.), *that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor things present, nor things to come, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. Nor any other creature*: Here is a sufficient induction of particulars; and nothing left out of this catalogue but one, and that is sin, which is none of God's creatures, but our own. This indeed deliberately consented to, and wilfully continued in, will finally part God and us, and for ever hinder us from being happy.

But if we be careful to avoid this, which only can separate between God and us, nothing can deprive us of him:

him : the aids and influences of his grace none can intercept or hinder ; the joys and comforts of his Holy Spirit none can take from us. All other things may leave us and forsake us ; we may be debarred of our best friends, and banished from all our acquaintance ; but men can send us no whither from the presence of God. Our communication with heaven cannot be prevented or interrupted. Our prayers and our souls will always find the way thither from the uttermost parts of the earth.

V. God is an eternal good ; and nothing but what is so can make us happy. Man having an immortal spirit, and being designed for an endless duration, must have a happiness proportionable : for which reason nothing in this world can make us happy, because we shall abide and remain after it. When a very few years are past and gone, and much sooner for any thing we know, all the things of this world will leave us, or else we shall be taken away from them : *but God is from everlasting to everlasting ; he is the same, and his years fail not* : Therefore well might David fix his happiness upon God alone, and say, *Whom have I in heaven but thee ? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee. When my heart faileth, and my strength faileth, God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever.*

VI. God is able to support and comfort us, in every condition, and under all the accidents and adversities of human life. Outward afflictions may hurt our body, but they cannot reach our soul ; and, so long as that remains unwounded, *the spirit of man can bear his infirmities*. God is intimate to our souls, and hath secret ways whereby to convey the joys and comforts of his Holy Spirit into our hearts, under the bitterest afflictions and sharpest sufferings. He can enable us by his grace, *to possess our souls in patience*, when all other things are taken from us. When there is nothing but trouble about us, he can give us *peace and joy in believing* ; when we are *persecuted, afflicted, and tormented*, he can give us that ravishing sight of the glories of another world, that steadfast assurance of a future blessedness, as shall quite extinguish all sense of present sufferings. How did many of the primitive Christian martyrs, in the
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midft of their torments, and under the very pangs of death, *rejoice in the hope of the glory of God?*

There are none of us but may happen to fall into thofe circumftances of danger, and of bodily pains and fufferings, as to have no hopes of relief and comfort but from God; none in all the world to truft to but him only: and in the greateft evils that can befall us in this life, he is a fure refuge and fanctuary; and, to repeat the words of the Pfalmift after the text, *when our heart fails, and our ftrength fails, God is the ftrength of our hearts, and our portion for ever.*

Now, what would any of us do in fuch a cafe, if it were not for God? Human nature is liable to desperate ftraits and exigencies; and he is not happy who is not provided againft the worft that may happen. It is fad to be reduced to fuch a condition, as to be deftitute of all comfort and hope; and yet men may be brought to that extremity, that, if it were not for God, they would not know which way to turn themfelves, or how to entertain their thoughts with any comfortable confideration under their prefent anguifh.

All men naturally refort to God in extremity, and cry out to him for help. Even the moft profane and Atheiftical, when they are deftitute of all other comfort, will run to God, and take hold of him, and cling about him. But *God hath no pleasure in fools*; in thofe who neglect and defpife him in their profperity, though they owe that alfo entirely to him: but when the evil day comes, then they lay hold of him as their only refuge. When all things go well with them, *God is not in all their thoughts*; but *in their affliction they will seek him early*: then they will cry, *Lord, Lord*; but he will fay to them in that day, *Depart from me, ye workers of iniquity, for I know you not.*

Here will be the great unhappinefs of fuch perfons, that God will then appear terrible to them, fo as they fhall not be able, when they look up to him, to abide his frowns; and at the fame time that they are forced to acknowledge him, and to fupplicate to him for mercy and forgivenefs, they fhall be ready to despair of it. Then thofe terrible threatenings of God's word will come to their minds, Prov. i. 24. 25. &c. *Because I called, and*

ye refused; I stretched out my hand, and no man regarded; but ye set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof: I also will laugh at your calamity, and mock when your fear cometh; when your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon you. Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me: for that they hated knowledge, and did not chuse the fear of the Lord. They would none of my counsel; they despised all my reproof. Therefore shall they eat the fruit of their own ways, and be filled with their own devices. The ease of the simple shall slay them, and the prosperity of fools shall destroy them. To which I will add that terrible passage in the Prophet, concerning the perverse and obstinate Jews, Is. xxvii. 11. They are a people of no understanding; therefore he that made them will not have mercy on them, and he that formed them will shew them no favour. And men are miserable creatures indeed, when God their maker doth abandon them, and hath so far hardened his heart against them, that he can have no pity and compassion for them.

VII. and lastly, which is consequent upon all the rest, God is such a good as can give perfect rest and tranquility to our minds: and that which cannot do this, though it had all the properties before mentioned, cannot make us happy; for he is not happy who does not think himself so, whatever cause he may have to think so. Now, what in reason can give us disquiet, if we do firmly believe, that there is a God, and that his providence rules and governs all things for the best; and that God is all that to good men which hath now been said of him. Why should not our minds be in perfect repose, when we are secure of the chief good, and have found out that which can make us happy, and is willing to make us so, if we be not wanting to ourselves, and, by our wilful obstinacy and rebellion against him, do not oppose and frustrate his design?

If a considerate man were permitted to his own choice, to wish the greatest good to himself that he could possibly devise, after he had searched heaven and earth, the result of all his wishes would be, that there were just such a being as we must necessarily conceive God to be: nor
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would he chuse any other friend or benefactor, any other protector for himself, or governor for the whole world, than infinite power, conducted and managed by infinite wisdom and goodness; which is the true notion of a God. After all his inquiry, he would come to the Psalmist's conclusion here in the text, *whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee.*

Vain man is apt to seek for happiness elsewhere; but this proceeds from want of due consideration: for when all things are well weighed, and all accounts rightly cast up and adjusted, we shall at last settle in David's resolution of that great question, Psal. iv. 6. 7. 8. What is the chief good of man? *There be many (says he) that say, Who will shew us any good?* that is, Men are generally inquisitive after happiness, but greatly divided in their opinions about it. Most men place it in the present enjoyment of this world; but David, for his part, pitches upon God, in whom he was fully convinced, that the happiness of man does consist: *There be many that say, Who will shew us any good? Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us. Thou hast put gladness in my heart, more than in the time that their corn and wine increased.* The great joy of the men of this world is in a plentiful harvest, and the abundance of the good things of this life; but David had found that which gave more joy and gladness to his heart, the favour of God, and the *light of his countenance.* This gave perfect rest and tranquillity to his mind, so that he needed not to inquire any further; for so it follows in the next words, *I will both lay me down in peace, and rest: for thou, Lord, only makest me to dwell in safety.* The Hebrew word signifies *confidence* or *security.* Here, and nowhere else, his mind found rest, and was in perfect ease and security.

I shall now only make two or three inferences from this discourse, and so conclude.

1. This plainly shews us the great unreasonableness and folly of Atheism, which would banish the belief of God and his providence out of the world: which, as it is most impious in respect of God, so is it most malicious to men; because it strikes at the very foundation of
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our happiness, and perfectly undermines it. For if there were no God, man would evidently be the most unhappy of all other beings here below ; because his unhappiness would be laid in the very frame of his nature, in that which distinguishes him from all other beings below him, I mean in his reason and understanding ; and he would be so much more miserable than the beasts, by how much he hath a farther reach, and a larger prospect of future evils ; a quicker apprehension, and a deeper and more lasting resentment of them.

So that if any man could see reason to stagger his belief of a God, or of his providence, as I am sure there is infinite reason to the contrary ; yet the belief of these things is so much for the interest, and comfort, and happiness of mankind, that a wise man would be heartily troubled to part with a principle so favourable to his quiet, and that does so exactly answer all the natural desires, and hopes, and fears of men ; and is so equally calculated, both for our comfort in this world, and for our happiness in the other. For when a man's thoughts have ranged and wandered as far as they can, his mind can find no rest, no probable foundation of happiness, but God only ; no other reasonable, no nor tolerable hypothesis and scheme of things for a wise man to rely upon, and to live and die by : for no other principle but this, firmly believed and truly lived up to by an answerable practice, was ever able to support the generality of mankind, and to minister true consolation to them under the calamities of life, and the pangs of death.

And if there were not something real in the principles of religion, it is impossible that they should have so remarkable and so regular an effect to support our minds in every condition, upon so great a number of persons of different degrees of understanding, of all ranks and conditions, young and old, learned and unlearned, in so many distant places, and in all ages of the world, the records whereof are come down to us ; I say so real, and so frequent, and so regular an effect as this is, cannot, with any colour of reason, be ascribed either to blind chance, or mere imagination, but must have a real, and regular, and uniform cause, proportionable to so great and general an effect.

I remember that Grotius, in his excellent book of the truth of the Christian religion, hath this observation, That God did not intend that the principles of religion should have the utmost evidence that any thing is capable of, and such as is sufficient to answer and bear down all sorts of captious cavils and objections against it; but so much as is abundantly sufficient to satisfy a sober and impartial inquirer after truth; one that hath no other interest but to find out truth, and when he hath found it, to yield to it: if it were otherwise, and the principles of religion were as glaring and evident as the sun shining at noonday, as there could hardly be any virtue in such a faith, so infidelity would be next to an impossibility.

All that I would expect from any man that shall say that he cannot see sufficient reason to believe the being and the providence of God, is this, that he would offer some other principles; that he would advance any other hypothesis, and scheme of things, that is more agreeable to the common and natural notions of men, and to all appearances of things in the world; and that does bid more fairly for the comfort and happiness of mankind, than these principles of the being of a God, and of his watchful providence over the children of men, do plainly do: and till this be clearly done, the principles of religion, which have generally been received by mankind, and have obtained in the world in all ages, cannot fairly be discarded, and ought not to be disturbed, and put out of possession. And this I think puts this whole matter upon a very fair and reasonable issue; and that nothing more needs to be said concerning it.

2. From what hath been said in the foregoing discourse, it naturally follows, that God is the only object of our trust and confidence; and therefore to him alone, and to no other, we ought to address all our prayers and supplications for *mercy and grace to help in time of need*. But now, according to the doctrine and practice of the church of Rome, the Psalmist here puts a very odd and strange question, *Whom have I in heaven but thee?* To which they must give a quite different answer from what the Psalmist plainly intended, namely, That God was the sole object of his hope and trust, and that upon him alone he relied as his only comfort and happiness. But

to this assertion of the Psalmist the church of Rome can by no means agree: they understand this matter much better than the Psalmist did, namely, That, besides God, there are in heaven innumerable angels and saints, in whom we are to repose great trust and confidence; and to whom also we are to address solemn prayers and supplications, not only for temporal good things, but for the pardon of our sins, for the increase of our graces, and for eternal life: that there are in heaven particular advocates and patrons for all exigencies and occasions, against all sorts of dangers and diseases, for all graces and virtues; and, in a word, for all temporal, spiritual, and eternal blessings; to whom we may apply ourselves, without troubling God and our blessed Saviour, who also is *God blessed for evermore*, by presuming upon every occasion to make our immediate addresses to him. For, as they would make us believe, though Abraham was ignorant of it, and David knew it not, the blessed spirits above, both angels and saints, do not only intercede with God for us for all sorts of blessings, but we may make direct and immediate addresses to them to bestow these blessings upon us: for so they do in the church of Rome; as is evident, beyond all denial, from several of their prayers in their most public and authentic liturgies.

They would indeed fain palliate this matter, by telling us, that by these direct and immediate addresses to angels and saints to bestow grace and eternal life upon them, they mean no more, but only to pray to them, that they would be pleased to intercede with God for these blessings to be bestowed upon them by their mediation. But if they mean no more, why do they say more than they mean? why do they use such expressions as, to the common sense and understanding of mankind, do signify a great deal more than they say they mean; such expressions as they themselves do acknowledge, if they be understood according to the most obvious sense of the words, would render them guilty of flat idolatry: especially when they know that they are charged with idolatry upon this account; and since, to clear themselves of it, they will not alter their prayers, they justly lie under the suspicion of it?

And

And yet admitting what they say in this matter to be true, and that by these expreffions in their prayers they intend no more, but the folemn invocation of angels and faints, that they would intercede with God to beftow thefe bleffings upon them for the fake of their merits, and upon their mediation ; yet this furely is a great deal too much, and cannot be done without a high intrenchment upon the office of the only *Mediator between God and men, the man Chrift Jefus*. But let them not deceive themfelves, *God is not mocked. The Lord our God is a jealous God, and he will not give his glory to another*.

I have not yet instanced in the groffest part of their fuperftition, not to fay downright idolatry, in this kind ; I mean in their extravagant worship of the bleffed Virgin and mother of our Lord ; whom they blafphemoufly call the *Queen of heaven* ; and whom, by a new ftyle, unknown to the fcriptures and primitive antiquity, they think to dignify with the modifh title of *our Lady* ; as if that could be any addition of honour to her, whom the angel declared to be *bleffed among women* : who, if fhe knew any thing of the follies of her worshippers here below, with what difdain and indignation do we think fhe hears thofe infinite prayers that are made to her, and that facrilegious worship which is given her in that church, and which makes both pages of their religion ; and which for the frequency of it, both in their public and private devotions, is very much beyond what they give to God and Chrift ; as if there were none in heaven but fhe, nor any thing upon earth to be worshipped in comparifon of her image ?

Nay, fo far have they carried this extravagant folly, and how much farther they would have carried it, had not the reformation given a check to it, God only knows ; fo far, I fay, have they proceeded in this folly, as, in that famous book of their devotions, called *our Lady's pfalter*, not only to apply to her fome part of this pfalm out of which I have taken my text, beginning it thus, *How good is God to Israel, to them that worship his bleffed mother* ? but they have likewise profanely burlefqued, I cannot afford it a better term, this whole book of pfalms, applying to her almoft the higheft things that are there faid concerning God and our bleffed Saviour. *Hear,*

O heavens, and give ear, O earth; and be ye horribly astonished, to see the best and wisest religion in the world transformed into superstition and folly; and to see the most learned persons in that communion set themselves in good earnest to justify all these follies and absurdities by a grave and groundless pretence to infallibility.

3. and lastly, This shews us how necessary the favour of God is to every man's happiness: and there is but one way to gain his friendship and favour, by becoming holy and good, as he is. Then may we rejoice and glory in God, as the Psalmist here does, and say, *Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee.* A wicked man dreads God above all things in the world, and he has great reason to do so: *For he is not a God that hath pleasure in wickedness, neither shall evil dwell with him: the foolish shall not stand in his sight, he hateth all the workers of iniquity.* When by sin we depart from God, we forsake our own happiness: *Salvation is far from the wicked,* says David, Psal. cxix. 155. and again, a little after the text, *They that are far from thee shall perish. But it is good for me to draw near to God.* Now, by holiness and goodness we draw near to him, who alone can make us happy.

It is certainly the common interest of mankind there should be a God, because we cannot possibly be happy without him: but then it is no man's interest to be wicked, because thereby we make him our enemy *in whose favour is life,* and upon whom all our hopes of happiness do depend.

To conclude: If we would have God for our happiness, we must be sure to make him our friend; and then we may promise to ourselves all those advantages which the friendship of so great and powerful a patron can give us. And there is but one way to establish a firm friendship between God and us; and that is, by doing his will, and living in obedience to his laws: *Ye are my friends, (saith our blessed Lord) if ye do whatsoever I command you. This is the love of God, (saith St John), that we keep his commandments:* and to love God is the way to be made partakers of those glorious things which God hath prepared for them that love him; such as eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man.

man. Which God of his infinite goodnefs grant we may all at laft be made partakers of, for his mercies fake in Jefus Chrift. To whom, with thee, O Father, and the Holy Ghoft, be all honour and glory, dominion and power, both now and for ever. *Amen.*

S E R M O N XLI.

A thanksgiving fermen for the late victory at fea.

Preached before the King and Queen at Whitehall, October 27. 1692.

J E R. ix. 23. 24.

Thus faith the Lord, Let not the wife man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might; let not the rich man glory in his riches; but let him that glorieth, glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the Lord which exercise loving-kindness, judgement, and righteousness in the earth: for in these things I delight, faith the Lord.

THese words are a message from God sent by his Prophet to the people of the Jews, who trusted in their own wisdom, and might, and riches, for their safety and preservation from that destruction which, in the former part of this chapter, God had threatened to bring upon them by the King of Babylon. To take them off from this vain confidence is this message sent to them, *Thus faith the Lord, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might; let not the rich man glory in his riches: but let him that glorieth, glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the Lord which exercise loving-kindness, judgement, and righteousness in the earth: for in these things I delight, faith the Lord.*

In the handling of these words, I shall abstract from the particular occasion of them; and only consider the general truth contained in them; which I shall do under these two heads.

1. What we are not to glory in: *Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might; let not the rich man glory in his riches.*

2. What it is that is matter of true glory: *But let him that glorieth, glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the Lord which exercise loving-kindness, judgement, and righteousness in the earth.*

I. What we are not to glory in. The text instanceth in three things, which are the great idols of mankind, and in which they are very apt to pride themselves, and to place their confidence, namely, *wisdom*, and *might*, and *riches*. I shall consider these severally, and shew how little reason there is to glory in any of them.

1. *Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom.* This may comprehend both human knowledge, and likewise prudence in the management of affairs. We will suppose both these to be intended here by the name of *wisdom*: *Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom*; that is, neither in the largeness and compass of his knowledge and understanding, nor in his skill and dexterity in the contrivance and conduct of human affairs; and that for these two reasons.

1. Because the highest pitch of human knowledge and wisdom is very imperfect.

2. Because when knowledge and wisdom are, with much difficulty, in any competent measure attained, how easily are they lost?

1st, The highest pitch of human knowledge and wisdom is very imperfect. Our ignorance doth vastly exceed our knowledge at the best. Wisdom in any tolerable degree is difficult to be attained; but perfection in it utterly to be despaired of. Where is there to be found so strong and sound a head, as hath no soft place; so perfect, so clear an understanding, as hath no flaw, no dark water in it? How hard a matter is it to be truly wise? and yet there are so many pretenders to wisdom, as would almost tempt a man to think that nothing is easier. Men do frequently murmur and repine at the
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unequal distribution of other things, as of health and strength, of power and riches: but, if we will trust the judgement of most men concerning themselves, nothing is more equally shared among mankind than a good degree of wisdom and understanding. Many will grant others to be superior to them in other gifts of nature, as in bodily strength and stature, and in the gifts of fortune, as in riches and honour; because the difference between one man and another in these qualities, is many times so gross and palpable, that no body hath the face to deny it: but very few, in comparison, unless it be in mere compliment and civility, will yield others to be wiser than themselves; and yet the difference in this also is for the most part very visible to every body but themselves.

So that true wisdom is a thing very extraordinary. Happy are they that have it: and next to them, not those many that think they have it, but those few that are sensible of their own defects and imperfections, and know that they have it not.

And, among all the kinds of wisdom, none is more nice and difficult, and meets with more frequent disappointments, than that which men are most apt to pride themselves in, I mean political wisdom and prudence; because it depends upon so many contingent causes, any one of which failing, the best laid design breaks and falls in pieces. It depends upon the uncertain wills and fickle humours, the mistaken and mutable interests of men, which are perpetually shifting from one point to another, so that no body knows where to find them. Besides an unaccountable mixture of that which the Heathens called *fortune*, but we Christians by its true name, the *providence of God*; which does frequently interpose in human affairs, and loves to confound the wisdom of the wise, and to turn their counsels into foolishness.

Of this we have a most remarkable example in Ahithophel, of whose wisdom the scripture gives this extraordinary testimony, that *the counsel which he counselled in those days, was as if one had inquired at the oracle of God; such was all the counsel of Ahithophel, both with David and with Absalom*. It seems he gave very good counsel also to Absalom; and because he would not follow it,
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was discontented to that degree, as to lay violent hands upon himself. And now who would pride himself in being so very wise, as to be able to give the best counsel in the world; and yet so very weak, as to make away himself, because he to whom it was given was not wise enough to take it?

The like miscarriages often happen in point of military skill and prudence. A great prince or general is sometimes so very cautious and wary, that nothing can provoke him to a battle; and then at another time, and perhaps in another element, so rash and wilful, that nothing can hinder him from fighting, and being beaten; as if the two elements made the difference, and caution were great wisdom at land, and confidence and presumption great prudence at sea. But the true reason of these things lies much deeper, in the secret providence of Almighty God, who when he pleases can so govern and over-rule both the understandings and the wills of men, as shall best serve his own wise purpose and design.

And as the highest pitch of human wisdom is very imperfect in itself, so is it much more so in comparison with the divine knowledge and wisdom. Compared with this, it is mere folly, and less than the understanding and wisdom of a child to that of the wisest man. *The foolishness of God* (says St Paul, 1 Cor. i. 25.) *is wiser than men*; that is, the least grain of divine wisdom is infinitely beyond all the wisdom of men: but in opposition to the wisdom of God, the wisdom of men is less than nothing and vanity. Let men design things never so prudently, and make them never so sure, even to the Popish and French degree of infallibility; let them reckon upon it as *a blow that cannot fail*; yet, after all, *the counsel of the Lord, that shall stand; and he will do all his pleasure: for there is no wisdom, nor understanding, nor counsel, against the Lord.*

And now we may ask the question which Job does, chap. xxviii. ver. 12. *Where shall wisdom be found? and where is the place of understanding?* And we must answer it as he does, ver. 13. *It is not to be found in the land of the living*; unless it be that one infallible point of wisdom to which God directs every man, and of which every man is capable, viz. religion
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and the fear of God : Job xxviii. 28. *Unto man he said, Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil, is understanding.*

2dly, When knowledge and wisdom are with great difficulty in any competent measure attained, how easily are they lost ? By a disease, by a blow upon the head, by a sudden and violent passion, which may disorder the strongest brain, and confound the clearest understanding in a moment : nay, even the excess of knowledge and wisdom, especially if attended with pride, as too often it is, is very dangerous, and does many times border upon distraction, and run into madness ; like an athletic constitution and perfect state of health, which is observed by physicians to verge upon some dangerous disease, and to be a forerunner of it.

And when a man's understanding is once crazed and shattered, how are the finest notions and thoughts of the wisest man blundered and broken, perplexed and intangled, like a puzzled lump of silk, so that the man cannot draw out a thought to any length ; but is forced to break it off, and to begin at another end ? Upon all which, and many more accounts, *let not the wise man glory in his wisdom*, which is so very imperfect : so hard to be attained, and yet so easy to be lost.

2. *Neither let the mighty man glory in his might.* Which, whether it be meant of natural strength of body, or of military force and power, how weak and imperfect is it, and how frequently foiled by an unequal strength ?

If we understand it of the natural strength of mens bodies, how little reason is there to glory in that, in which so many of the creatures below us do by so many degrees excel us ? in that which may so many ways be lost ; by sickness, by a maim, and by many other external accidents ; and which, however, will decay of itself, and by age sink into infirmity and weakness ?

And how little reason is there to glory in that which is so frequently foiled by an unequal strength ? of which Goliath is a famous instance. When he defied the host of Israel, and would needs have the matter decided by single combat, God inspired David to accept the challenge ; who, though he was no ways comparable to him
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in strength, and would have been nothing in his hands in close fight; yet God directed him to assail him at a distance, by a weapon that was too hard for him, a stone out of a sling, which struck the giant in the forehead, and brought his unwieldy bulk down to the earth.

Or if by *might* we understand military force and power, how little likewise is that to be gloried in, considering the uncertain events of war, and how very often and remarkably the providence of God doth interpose to cast the victory on the unlikely side? It is Solomon's observation, that such are the interpositions of divine providence in human affairs, that the event of things is many times not at all answerable to the power and probability of second causes, Eccles. ix. 11. *I returned, (says he), and saw under the sun, that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong.*

And one way, among many others, whereby the providence of God doth often interpose to decide the events of war, is by a remarkable change of the seasons and weather in favour of one side; as by sending great snows, or violent rains, to hinder the early motion and march of a powerful army, to the disappointment or prejudice of some great design; by remarkable winds and storms at sea, to prevent the conjunction of a powerful fleet; and by governing all these for a long time together, so visibly to the advantage of one side, as utterly to defeat the well-laid design of the other. Of all which, by the great mercy and goodness of God to us, we have had the happy experience in all our late signal deliverances and victories.

And here I cannot but take notice of a passage to this purpose in the book of Job: which may deserve our more attentive regard and consideration, because I take this book to be incomparably the most ancient of all others, and much older than Moses; and yet it is written with as lively a sense of the providence of God, and as noble figures and flights of eloquence, as perhaps any book extant in the world. The passage I mean is, where God, to convince Job of his ignorance in the secrets of nature and providence, poseth him with many hard questions, and with this amongst the rest, Job xxxviii. 22. 23. *Hast thou*

thou entered into the treasures of the snow? or hast thou seen the treasures of the hail, which I have reserved against the time of trouble, against the day of battle and war? The meaning of which is, that the providence of God doth sometimes interpose to determine the events of war, by governing the seasons and the weather, and by making *the snows and rains, the winds and storms, to fulfil his word, and to execute his pleasure.*

Of this we have a remarkable instance in the defeat of Sisera's mighty army; against whom, in the song of Deborah, the stars are said to *have fought in their courses*. The expression is poetical; but the plain meaning of it is, that by mighty and sudden rains, which the common opinion did ascribe to a special influence of the planets, the river of Kishon, near which Sisera's army lay, was so raised and swollen, as to drown the greatest part of that huge host. For so Deborah explains *the fighting of the stars in their courses against Sisera: They fought* (says he) *from heaven, the stars in their courses fought against Sisera; the river Kishon swept them away:* as if the stars, which were supposed by their influence to have caused those sudden and extraordinary rains, had set themselves in battle-array against Sisera and his army.

Therefore *let not the mighty man glory in his might, which is so small in itself; but in opposition to God, is weakness and nothing. The weakness of God* (says St Paul) *is stronger than men.* All power to do mischief is but impotence, and therefore no matter of boasting: Psal. lii. 2. *Why boasteth thou thyself, thou tyrant, that thou art able to do mischief? the goodness of God endureth continually.* The goodness of God is too hard for the pride and malice of man, and will last and hold out when that hath tired and spent itself.

3. *Let not the rich man glory in his riches.* In these men are apt to pride themselves: even the meanest and poorest spirits, who have nothing to be proud of but their money, when they have got good store of that together, how will they swell and strut? as if, because they are *rich, and increased in goods, they wanted nothing.*

But we may do well to consider, that riches are things without us; not the real excellencies of our nature, but
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the accidental ornaments of our fortune. If they descend upon us, they are the privilege of our birth, not the effect of our wisdom and industry; and those things, in the procurement whereof we had no hand, we can hardly call our own: and if they be the fruit of our own prudent industry, that is no such matter of glorying; because men of much flower understandings do commonly outdo others in diligence and drudging, their minds lying more level to the low design of being rich.

At the best, riches are uncertain: *Charge them* (says St Paul) *that are rich in this world, that they be not high-minded, nor trust in uncertain riches.* Men have little reason to pride themselves, or to place their confidence in that which is uncertain, and even next to that which is not. So the wise man speaks of riches, Prov. xxiii. 5. *Wilt thou set thine heart upon that which is not? for riches certainly make themselves wings, they fly away as an eagle towards heaven.* He expresses it in such a manner, as if a rich man sat brooding over an estate till it was fledged, and had gotten itself wings to fly away.

But that which is the most stinging consideration of all is, that many men have an evil eye upon a good estate; so that, instead of being the means of our happiness, it may prove the occasion of our ruin. So the same wise man observes, Eccles. v. 13. *There is a sore evil which I have seen under the sun, namely, riches kept for the owners thereof to their hurt.* And it is not without example, that a very rich man hath been excepted out of a general pardon, both as to life and estate, for no other visible reason but his vast and overgrown fortune. So Solomon observes to us again, Prov. i. 19. *So are the ways of every one that is greedy of gain; which taketh away the life of the owners thereof.* And why should any man be proud of his danger, of that which one time or other may be the certain and only cause of his ruin! A man may be too rich to be forgiven a fault, which would never have been prosecuted against a man of a middle fortune. For these reasons, and a great many more, *let not the rich man glory in his riches.*

II. I proceed to consider, what it is that is matter of true glory: *But let him that glorieth, glory in this, that he*

he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the Lord, which exercise loving-kindness, judgement, and righteousness in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the Lord.

That he understandeth and knoweth me. Here are two words used to express the thing more fully, *understanding* and *knowledge*; which seem not only to import right apprehensions of the being, and providence, and perfections of God, but likewise a lively sense of these things, and affections suitable to these apprehensions.

That he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the Lord; that is, the creator and the sovereign governor of the world.

Which exercise loving-kindness, judgement, and righteousness in the earth.

The best knowledge of religion, and that which is the foundation of all the rest, is the knowledge of the divine nature and perfections; especially of those which are most proper for our imitation. And such are those mentioned in the text; *loving-kindness*, and *judgement*, and *righteousness*. Which we may distinguish thus. *Loving-kindness* comprehends God's milder attributes, his goodness, and mercy, and patience. *Judgement* signifies his severer dealings with men, whether in the chastisement of his people, or in the remarkable punishment of great offenders for example and warning to others. *Righteousness* seems to be a word of a larger signification, and to denote that universal rectitude of the divine nature, which appears in all the administrations of his providence here below: for the text speaks of the exercise of these perfections in this world: *Which exercise loving-kindness, judgement, and righteousness in the earth.*

Several of the perfections of the divine nature are incommunicable to a creature, and therefore cannot be thought to be proposed to us for a pattern: as, self existence, independence, and all-sufficiency; the eternity and the immensity of the divine being; to be the original cause of all other things, and the sovereign governor of the whole world: for God only is sufficient for that; and to be a match for all the world, a *nec pluribus impar*, is not a motto fit for a mortal man. A creature may swell

with pride till it burst, before it can stretch itself to this pitch of power and greatness. It is an unsufferable presumption, and a sottish ignorance of the necessary bounds and limits of our being, to think to resemble God in these perfections: this was the ambition of Lucifer, to *ascend into heaven*, and to *be like the Most High*.

In our imitation of God, we must still keep within the station of creatures; not affecting an independency and sovereignty like God, and to be omnipotent as he is: Job xl. 9. *Hast thou an arm like God? or canst thou thunder with a voice like him?* as God himself argues with Job.

For in these things I delight, saith the Lord. God takes pleasure to exercise these perfections himself, and to see them imitated by us; and the imitation of these divine perfections is our perfection and glory. In comparison of which, all human wisdom, and power, and riches, are so far from being matter of glory, that they are very despicable and pitiful things. Knowledge and skill to devise mischief, and power to effect it, are the true nature and character of the devil and his angels; those apostate and accursed spirits, who in temper and disposition are most contrary to God, who is the rule and pattern of all perfection.

I shall only make two observations or inferences from what hath been said, and then apply the whole discourse to the great occasion of this day. And they are these:

1. That the wisest and surest reasonings in religion are grounded upon the unquestionable perfections of the divine nature.

2. That the nature of God is the true idea and pattern of perfection and happiness.

1. That the wisest and surest reasonings in religion are grounded upon the unquestionable perfections of the divine nature; upon those, more especially, which to us are most easy and intelligible; such as are those mentioned in the text. And this makes the knowledge of God, and of these perfections, to be so useful and so valuable; because all religion is founded in right notions of God, and of his perfections; insomuch that divine revelation itself does suppose these for its foundation, and can signify

nify nothing to us, unless these be first known and believed. For unless we be first firmly persuaded of the providence of God, and of his particular care of mankind, why should we suppose, that he makes any revelation of his will to us? Unless it be first naturally known, that God is a God of truth, what ground is there for the belief of his word? So that the principles of natural religion are the foundation of that which is revealed: and therefore nothing can in reason be admitted to be a revelation from God, which does plainly contradict his essential perfections.

Upon this principle a great many doctrines are, without more ado, to be rejected; because they do plainly, and at first sight, contradict the divine nature and perfections. I will give a few instances, instead of many that might be given.

In virtue of this principle, I cannot believe, upon the pretended authority or infallibility of any person, or church, that force is a fit argument to produce faith. No man shall ever persuade me, no not the Bishop of Meaux, with all his eloquence, that prisons and tortures, dragoons and the galleys, are proper means to convince the understanding, and either Christian or human methods of converting men to the true religion.

For the same reason I cannot believe, that God would not have men to understand their public prayers, nor the lessons of scripture which are read to them: because a lesson is something that is to be learned; and therefore a lesson that is not to be understood, is nonsense; for if it be not understood, how can it be learned?

As little can I believe, that God, who caused the holy scriptures to be written for the instruction of mankind, did ever intend, that they should be locked up and concealed from the people in an unknown tongue.

Least of all can I believe that doctrine of the council of Trent, that the saving efficacy of the sacraments doth depend upon the intention of the priest that administers them: which is to say, that though the people believe and live never so well, yet they may be damned by shoals, and whole parishes together, at the pleasure of

the priest; and this for no other reason, but because the priest is so cross and so cruel that he will not intend to save them.

Now, can any man believe this that hath any tolerable notion either of the goodness or justice of God? May we not appeal to God in this, as Abraham did in another case? *Wilt thou destroy the righteous with the wicked? That be far from thee to do after this manner: Shall not the judge of all the earth do right?* Much more, to destroy the righteous for the wicked, and that righteous and innocent people should lie at the mercy and will of a wicked and perverse priest, to be saved or damned by him, as he thinks fit: *That be far from thee: Shall not the judge of all the earth do right?* For, to drive the argument to the head, if this be to do right, there is no possibility of doing wrong.

Thus, in things which are more obscure, we should govern all our reasonings concerning God and religion by that which is clear and unquestionable; and should, with Moses, lay down this for a certain principle, *All his ways are judgement; a God of truth, and without iniquity, just and right is he:* and say with St Paul, *Is there then unrighteousness with God? God forbid;* and again, *We know that the judgement of God is according to truth.*

2. The other inference is this, That the nature of God is the true idea and pattern of perfection and happiness; and therefore nothing but our own conformity to it can make us happy. And for this reason, to understand and know God, is our great excellency and glory, because it is necessary to our imitation of him, who is the best and happiest being. And so far as we are from resembling God, so far are we distant from happiness, and the true temper of the blessed: for goodness is an essential ingredient of happiness. And as without goodness there can be no true majesty and greatness, so neither any true felicity and blessedness.

Now, goodness is a generous disposition of mind, to diffuse and communicate itself by making others to partake of our happiness, in such degrees as they are capable: for no being is so happy as it might be, that hath not the power and the pleasure to make others happy.

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This surely is the highest pleasure, I had almost said pride, of a great mind.

In vain therefore do we dream of happiness in any thing without us. Happiness must be within us; the foundation of it must be laid in the inward frame and disposition of our spirits: and the very same causes and ingredients which make up the happiness of God must be found in us, though in a much inferior degree; or we cannot be happy. They understand not the nature of happiness who hope for it upon any other terms. He who is the author and fountain of happiness cannot convey it to us by any other way, than by planting in us such dispositions of mind as are in truth a kind of participation of the divine nature, and by enduing us with such qualities as are the necessary materials of happiness; and a man may as soon be well without health, as happy without goodness.

If a wicked man were taken up into heaven, yet if he still continue the same bad man that he was before, *cælum non animum mutavit*: he may have changed the climate, and be gone into a far country; but because he carries himself still along with him, he will still be miserable from himself; because the man's mind is not changed all the while, which would signify a thousand times more to his happiness, than change of place, or of any outward circumstances whatsoever: for a bad man hath a fiend in his own breast, and the fuel of hell in his guilty conscience.

There is a certain kind of temper and disposition which is necessary and essential to happiness; and that is, holiness and goodness, which is the very nature of God: and so far as any man departs from this temper, so far he removes himself, and runs away from happiness. And here the foundation of hell is laid, in the evil disposition of a man's own mind, which is naturally a torment to itself: and till this be cured, it is as impossible for him to be happy, as for a limb that is out of joint to be at ease; because the man's spirit is out of order, and off the hinges, and as it were tossed from its centre; and till that be set right, and restored to its proper and natural state, the man will be perpetually unquiet, and can have no rest and peace within himself. *The wicked*

(saith the Prophet) *is like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest. There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked: no peace with God, no peace with his own mind; for a bad man is at perpetual discord and wars with himself. And hence (as St James tells us) come wars and fightings without us, even from our lusts which war in our members.*

And now that I have mentioned *wars and fightings without us*, this cannot but bring to mind the great and glorious occasion of this day; which gives us manifold cause of praise and thanksgiving to Almighty God, for several wonderful mercies and deliverances; and more particularly, for a most glorious victory at sea, vouchsafed to their Majesties fleet in this last summer's expedition.

For several great mercies and deliverances; for a wonderful deliverance indeed, from a sudden invasion designed upon us by the inveterate and implacable enemies of our peace and religion; which, by the merciful providence of God, was happily and strangely prevented, when it was just upon the point of execution.

Next, for the preservation of our gracious sovereign from that horrid and most barbarous attempt designed upon his sacred person; and from those great and manifold dangers to which he was exposed in his late tedious expedition; and for his safe and most welcome return to us.

And, lastly, for a most glorious victory at sea; the greatest and the cheapest that ever the sun saw from his first setting out to run his course. The opportunity indeed of this victory was through the rashness and confidence of our enemies, by the wise providence of God, put into our hands: but the improvement of this opportunity into so great and happy a victory, we owe, under God, to the matchless conduct and courage of the brave Admiral, and to the invincible resolution and valour of the Captains and seamen.

This great deliverance from the designed invasion, and this glorious victory, God vouchsafed to us at home, whilst his sacred Majesty was so freely hazarding his Royal person abroad in the public cause of the rights and liberties of almost all Europe.

And now what may God justly expect from us, as a
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meet return for his goodness to us? What, but that we should glorify him; first, by offering praise and thanksgiving; and then, by ordering our conversation aright, that he may still delight to shew us his salvation.

God might have stood aloof from us in the day of our distress; and have said to us, as he once did to the people of Israel, So often have I delivered you from the hands of your enemies, but ye have still provoked me more and more; *wherefore I will deliver you no more*, Judg. x. 13. He might have said of us, as he did of the same people, *I will hide my face from them, I will see what their end shall be: for they are a very froward generation, children in whom is no faith*, Deut. xxxii. 20. Our resolutions and promises of better obedience are not to be trusted; all our repentance and righteousness are but as the morning cloud, and like the early dew which passeth away. Nay, methinks God seems now to say to us, as he did of old to Jerusalem, Jer. vi. 8. *Be thou instructed, O Jerusalem, lest my soul depart from thee; lest I make thee desolate, a land not inhabited*.

We are here met together this day, to pay our solemn acknowledgements to the God of our salvation; who hath shewed strength with his arm, and hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their heart; even to him that exerciseth loving-kindness, and judgement, and righteousness in the earth: in him will we glory as our sure refuge and defence, as our mighty deliverer, and the rock of our salvation.

And now I have only to intreat your patience a little longer, whilst I apply what hath been discoursed upon this text a little more closely to the occasion of this day. I may be tedious; but I will not be long.

And blessed be God for this happy occasion; the greatest England ever had, and, in the true consequences of it, perhaps the greatest that Europe ever had, of praise and thanksgiving.

You have heard two sorts of persons described in the text, by very different characters; the one that glory in their wisdom, and might, and riches; the other, that glory in this, that they understand and know God to be the Lord, which exerciseth loving-kindness, and judgement, and righteousness in the earth.

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And we have seen these two characters exemplified, or rather drawn to the life, in this present age. We who live in this western part of Christendom have seen a mighty prince, by the just permission of God, raised up to be a terror and scourge to all his neighbours; a prince who had in perfection all the advantages mentioned in the former part of the text; and who, in the opinion of many who had been long dazzled with his splendor and greatness, hath passed for many years for the most politic, and powerful, and richest monarch that hath appeared in these parts of the world for many ages:

Who hath governed his affairs by the deepest and steadiest counsels, and the most refined wisdom of this world. A prince mighty and powerful in his preparations for war; formidable for his vast and well-disciplined armies, and for his great naval force; and who had brought the art of war almost to that perfection, as to be able to conquer and do his business without fighting; a mystery hardly known to former ages and generations: and all this skill and strength united under one absolute will, not hampered or bound up by any restraints of law or conscience?

A prince that commands the estates of all his subjects, and of all his conquests; which hath furnished him with an almost inexhaustible treasure and revenue: and one who, if the world doth not greatly mistake him, hath sufficiently gloried in all these advantages, and even beyond the rate of a mortal man.

But not *knowing God to be the Lord, which exercises loving-kindness, and judgement, and righteousness in the earth*; how hath the pride of all his glory been stained, by tyranny and oppression, by injustice and cruelty; by enlarging his dominions without right, and by making war upon his neighbours without reason, or even colour of provocation: and this in a more barbarous manner than the most barbarous nations ever did; carrying fire and desolation wheresoever he went, and laying waste many and great cities, without necessity, and without pity?

And now behold what a terrible rebuke the providence of God hath given to this mighty monarch, in the full career of his fortune and fury. The consideration whereof brings to my thoughts those passages in the Prophet concerning

concerning old Babylon, that standing and perpetual type of the great oppressors and persecutors of God's true church and religion, Is. xiv. 4. 6. 7. 9. 10. 12. 13. *How hath the oppressor ceased! the exactor of gold ceased! He who smote the people in wrath with a continual stroke; he that ruled the nations in anger, is himself persecuted, and none hindereth. The whole earth is at rest, and is quiet: they break forth into singing. The grave from beneath is moved for thee to meet thee at thy coming: it stirreth up the dead for thee, even all the captains of the earth; it hath raised up from their thrones all the kings of the nations. All they shall speak and say unto thee, Art thou also become weak as we are? art thou become like unto us? How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! how art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations! For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north; that is, upon mount Zion: for just so the Psalmist describes it, Psal. xlviii. 2. Beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth is mount Zion, in the sides of the north. Here the King of Babylon threatens to take Jerusalem, and to demolish the temple, where the congregation of Israel met for the worship of the true God: I will also sit upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: much in the same style with the threatenings of modern Babylon, "I will destroy the reformation, I will extirpate the northern heresy."*

And then he goes on, *I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High. Yet thou shalt be brought down to the grave, to the sides of the pit. They that see thee, shall narrowly look upon thee, and consider thee, saying, Is this the man that made the earth to tremble, that did shake kingdoms; that made the world as a wilderness, and destroyed the cities thereof, that opened not the house of his prisoners?*

God seems already to have begun this work, in the late glorious victory at sea; and I hope he will cut it short in righteousness. I have sometimes heretofore wondered, why, at the destruction of modern and mystical Babylon, the scripture should make so express mention of great wailing and lamentation for the loss of her ships and sea-

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men, Rev. xviii. 17. little imagining thirty years ago, that any of the kingdoms who had *given their power to the beast*, would ever have arrived to that mighty naval force. But the scripture saith nothing in vain.

Whether, and how far, success is an argument of a good cause, I shall not now debate: but thus much, I think, may safely be affirmed, that the providence of God doth sometimes, without plain and downright miracles, so visibly shew itself, that we cannot without great stupidity and obstinacy refuse to acknowledge it.

I grant, the cause must first be manifestly just, before success can be made an argument of God's favour to it, and approbation of it. And if the cause of true religion, and the necessary defence of it against a false and idolatrous worship, be a good cause, ours is so. And I do not here beg the question; we have abundantly proved it to the confusion of our adversaries. If the vindication of the common liberties of mankind against tyranny and oppression, be a good cause, then ours is so: and this needs not to be proved, it is so glaringly evident to all the world. And as our cause is not like theirs, so neither hath *their rock* been like *our rock*, *our enemies themselves being judges*.

And yet as bad an argument as success is of a good cause, I am sorry to say it, but I am afraid it is too true, it is like in the conclusion to prove the best argument of all other, to convince those who have so long pretended conscience against submission to the present government.

Mere success is certainly one of the worst arguments in the world of a good cause, and the most improper to satisfy conscience: and yet we find by experience, that in the issue it is the most successful of all other arguments; and does in a very odd, but effectual way, satisfy the consciences of a great many men, by shewing them their interest.

God has of late visibly made bare his arm in our behalf, though some are still so blind and obstinate that they will not see it: like those of whom the Prophet complains, Is. xxvi. 11. *Lord, when thy hand is lifted up they will not see: but they shall see, and be ashamed for their envy at the people.*

Thus have I represented unto you a mighty monarch,
who

who like a fiery comet hath hung over Europe for many years; and by his malignant influence hath made such terrible havock and devastations in this part of the world.

Let us now turn our view to the other part of the text, and behold a greater than he is here; a prince of a quite different character, who does *understand and know God to be the Lord, which does exercise loving-kindness, judgement, and righteousness in the earth*; and who hath made it the great study and endeavour of his life to imitate these divine perfections, as far as the imperfection of human nature in this moral state will admit: I say, a greater than he is here; who never said or did an insolent thing, but instead of despising his enemies, has upon all occasions encountered them with an undaunted spirit and resolution.

This is the man whom God hath honoured to give a check to this mighty man of the earth, and to put a hook into the nostrils of this great leviathan, who has so long had his pastime in the seas.

But we will not insult, as he once did in a most unprincipely manner over a man much better than himself, when he believed him to have been slain at the Boyne. And indeed death came then as near to him as was possible without killing him. But the merciful providence of God was pleased to step in for his preservation, almost by a miracle: for I do not believe, that from the first use of great guns to that day, any mortal man ever had his shoulder so kindly kissed by a cannon-bullet.

But I will not trespass any farther upon that which is the great ornament of all his other virtues; though I have said nothing of him but what all the world does see and must acknowledge: he is as much above being flattered, as it is beneath an honest and a generous mind to flatter.

Let us then *glory in the Lord, and rejoice in the God of our salvation*: let us now, in the presence of all his people, pay our most thankful acknowledgements to him *who is worthy to be praised*; even to the *Lord God of Israel, who alone doth wondrous things*; who giveth victory unto Kings, and hath preserved our David his servant from the hurtful sword.

And let us humbly beseech Almighty God, that he
would

would long preserve to us the invaluable blessing of our two excellent princes ; whom the providence of God hath sent amongst us, like two good angels ; not to rescue two or three persons, but almost a whole nation, out of Sodom, by saving us, I hope at last, from our vices, as well as at first from that vengeance which was just ready to have been poured down upon us :

Two sovereign princes reigning together, and in the same throne ; and yet so entirely one, as perhaps no nation, no age, can furnish us with a parallel ; two princes perfectly united in the same design of promoting the true religion, and the public welfare, by reforming our manners, and, as far as is possible, by repairing the breaches and healing the divisions of a miserably distracted church and nation : in a word, two princes who are contented to sacrifice themselves and their whole time to the care of the public ; and for the sake of that to deny themselves almost all sorts of ease and pleasure. To deny themselves, did I say ? No ; they have wisely and judiciously chosen the truest and highest pleasure that this world knows, the pleasure of doing good, and being benefactors to mankind. May they have a long and happy reign over us, to make us happy, and to lay up in store for themselves a happiness without measure, and without end, in God's glorious and everlasting kingdom ; for his mercies sake in Jesus Christ. To whom, with thee, O Father, and the Holy Ghost, be all honour and glory, thanksgiving and praise, both now and for ever. *Amen.*

The end of the Second Volume.



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